

RUENIORCUE

MAD SCIENCE & MONSTERS!

NICK CUTTER
SLASH
AND RODRIGO GUDIÑO

TEAR OPEN

BREACH

213 JULY/AUGUST 2023 US \$13.95 CAN \$14.95

MARRS MEDIA INC. RUE-MORGUE.COM PLEASE DISPLAY UNDER FILM AND VIDEO MULTIPLAYER GAME BASED ON TRUE EVENTS

THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE

THE LAST VOYAGE
OF THE DEMETER

MIKE MIGNOLA ON RICHARD CORBEN'S DEN

PLUS

SWAMP THING ARISES UNCUT ON 4K UHD 💖 BACKSTAGE AND BEYOND WITH FABIO FRIZZI 💖 THE SWISSPLOITATION MADNESS OF MAD HEIDI

THE NEWEST & GNARLIEST



DANZA MACABRA VOLUME ONE: THE ITALIAN GOTHIC COLLECTION

The Italian Gothic genre embraced themes of violence, madness and sexual deviance. With these 4 films, those impulses dare to go even deeper.

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY



LA PETITE MORT 2: NASTY TAPES

Snuff films are expensive to make... who is paying to make them? **AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY**

AND DVD



SCREAM (1981)

A group of friends on a rafting trip stop at an old ghost town. After their rafts disappear they are eliminated one by one by a mysterious killer.

AVAILABLE ON 4K ULTRA HD



MAKO: THE JAWS OF DEATH + BOG DRIVE-IN DOUBLE FEATURE #14

Neither oceans nor swamps are safe in these two underwater 1970's Grindhouse Drive-In classics for one great price! **AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY**



WITCHTRAP **SPECIAL EDITION**

A team of parapsychologists try to exorcise a house which is haunted by the owner's heartless uncle.

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY AND DVD



DEAD & BURIED 4K UHD BLU-RAY

Something very strange is happening in the quiet coastal village of Potters Bluff, where tourists are warmly welcomed... then brutally murdered. **AVAILABLE ON 4K ULTRA HD**



THE TOXIC **AVENGER** COLLECTION 8-DISC TOX SET

8-Disc 4K Ultra HD + Special **Edition Blu-ray Collection of all** four cult classic Toxic Avenger

AVAILABLE ON 4K ULTRA HD



DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS 4K UHD BLU-RAY

An ageless Countess and her beautiful young companion seduce a troubled newlywed couple at a deserted seaside resort.

AVAILABLE ON 4K ULTRA HD



MIDNIGHT SON BLU-RAY/DVD/CD

A love affair between a reclusive young man and a bartender meets a tragic end when he becomes a suspect in a series of horrific murders.

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY/DVD/ CD AND DVD



SWAMP THING COLLECTOR'S **EDITION**

After a violent incident with a special chemical, a research scientist is turned into a swamp plant monster. **Based on the smash hit DC Comic Book!**

AVAILABLE ON 4K ULTRA HD AND BLU-RAY



MAGIC COP

The great Lam Ching-ying faces a new supernatural challenge: someone is using the living dead to smuggle drugs into modern day Hong Kong.

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY



CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD

When a priest hangs himself in a cemetery, he opens the gates of hell in the mysterious New **England town of Dunwich.**

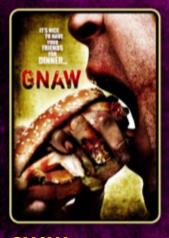
AVAILABLE ON 4K U LTRA HD



HI-FEAR

An ambitious young illustrator is forced to create four of the most terrifying stories imaginable for a new comic book,

AVAILABLE ON DVD



GNAW

Six friends on vacation in the countryside fall victim to a sadistic family of cannibals.

AVAILABLE ON DVD



THE ONES YOU **DIDN'T BUR**

After the death of his father a young man becomes embroiled in an occult conspiracy. AVAILABLE ON DVD

NOW AVAILABLE AT MVDSHOP.com

MVDvisual



USE CODE RM0723 AND SAVE 10% OFF YOUR ORDER THRU 09.30.23

UXE AND RECEIVE

SUBSCRIBE DE

PRINT AND DIGITAL EDITIONS OF RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

ACCESS RM'S ENTIRE ARCHIVE OF AVAILABLE

DIGITAL BACK ISSUES (130+ ISSUES!)

INCLUDING DIGITAL EDIT BAVAILABLE ON 10S AND





E NEWSSTAND AND DIGITAL NEWSSTAND PRICE!

😞 SAVE UP TO 60% OFF TH

FREE SHIPPING

IONS OF RARE AND SOLD OUT BACK ISSUES

YOUR MAILBOX

🍔 MAGAZINE DELIVERED TO

ANDROID



RUE-MORGUE.COM F The





12 **OF MADNESS AND MONSTERS**

Rue Morgue's founding editor and president, Rodrigo Gudiño, is joined by author Nick Cutter and rock icon Slash for their new horror film *The Breach*, a Lovecraft-inspired creature feature set in the woods of Northern Ontario.

by Rodrigo Gudiño, Craig Davidson, hate mior

SURVIVE THE

Gun Interactive and original *TCM* scriptwriter Kim Henkel team up for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, an asymmetrical horror experience unlike any other. **by Andrea Subissati**

26 INTO THE NEVERWHERE

In the history of comics, few have matched the hyperbolic horror of legendary artist Richard Corben. Now, one of the master fantasist's most famous epics is resurrected.

PLUS! Hellboy creator Mike Mignola reflects on Den and his own collaboration with its late creator.

by **DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ**

30 THE DOOMED SEAS

and the same of the design of the same of

Filmmaker André Øvredal brings some of the most frightening pages of Bram Stoker's Dracula to life in his new film The Last Voyage of the Demeter.

by **RICK HIPSON**

DEPARTMENTS

Pride and Prejudice

weirdos.

Weird Stats & Morbid Facts, Expiring Minds, Shadowland, and more!

NEEDFUL THINGS 10

Strange trinkets from our bazaar of the bizarre.

The newest films reviewed.

on 4K UHD.

DUG UP: Superstition (1982).

EXHIBIT: The Black Pit of Dr. M (1959).

INKED IN: Russell Goldman and Jamie Lee Curtis' Mother Nature.

SPOTLIGHT: Tenebrous Press.

THE FRIGHT GALLERY 5

ON DISPLAY: The Multi-Coloured Monsters of Mark Spears.

DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS 54

curio: Absurdities of The Descent 2.

NOW PLAYING: Backstage and Beyond with Fabio Frizzi.

FEATURING: Buddy Simulator 1984 and Dredge.

DEBATE: What horror movie involving Al is most likely to have predicted what our future holds?



kay, let's address that blood-spattered elephant in the room right off the bat: Rodrigo's new movie is the cover story of this issue. Yes, the same Rodrigo you've seen on the masthead as publisher, the same Rodrigo who started this very mag in his dorm room 26 years ago. But you know, to me, he's also the Rodrigo who makes the best soft shell tofu tacos, the Rodrigo who never balks at my wildest ideas for the mag, and the Rodrigo who encouraged a clueless twentysomething to pursue a career in the incredibly niche world of horror journalism. If it strikes you as odd or inappropriate that we're running coverage of his new movie, *The Breach*, on our cover, know that I also grappled with some initial apprehensions of my own.

Without sounding too defensive (one of the many lessons from my mentor is to never apologize for my editorial decisions), there are a lot of considerations you might not be aware of when it comes to determining a cover story — it's not like I just throw on whatever strikes my fancy that day. If that were true, we would have run a nude photo spread of Oscar Isaac by now, or a ten-page tribute to the passing of Lisa Vanderpump's dog Giggy (rest in power, king). As I repeat ad nauseum to the PR email that clogs my inbox, a cover story requires many a thing to work for *Rue Morgue*: solid material, availability of strong assets, and a sense in my heart that this is something horror fans need to know about. That last detail is difficult to describe — it's something I feel deep in my soul, an instinct that I trust to cut through the hype and advertising dollars and marketing loot boxes that I receive (and quite enjoy).

That *The Breach* meets the first two criteria of that trifecta isn't in question — we talk to fucking Slash for the story, as well as screenwriter Nick Cutter, whose novels have left more indelible marks on me than my favourite tattoo artists have. But still, I wondered — would our readers cry bias? Would they question the integrity of the magazine? And on the heels of that, would they question *my* integrity with this decision, leaving a black mark on my otherwise spotless record (it's my internal dialogue/editorial fantasy here, indulge me).

The fact is that *Rue Morgue* celebrates the genre, and insofar as there are myriad ways to approach this aim and a veritable glut of great content out there to cover, I cannot, in good conscience, disqualify a film because my mentor made it, just as I cannot disqualify a film because its producer cut the line in front of me at a convention food booth, or its supporting actor mocked me on Twitter (you know who you are). It's not about me, at the end of the day, and my responsibility here is less to Rodrigo or to me than it is to you, the reader. You might agree with my reasoning and you might not, but leaving these opinions in your discerning hands is what *Rue Morgue* has always done — and that, to me, is where we've earned our integrity.

So please join me in celebrating Rodrigo's return to the director's chair after a decade and the announcement that his creative collaboration with Slash continues with the launch of their new genre production studio, BerserkerGang Films. Like the Slaughter family in Gun's new *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* game (see feature!), we're kin around here, and that includes you. Summer heat means fall is just around the corner, and I know you know what that means. In the meantime, unto *The Breach*!

ANDREA SUBISSATI andrea@rue-morgue.com

& bissal

RUE NORGUE

MARRS MEDIA INC. RUE-MORGUE.COM

17 WILLINGDON BLVD, ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO, M8X 2H1, CANADA

PH: 416.651.9675 FAX: 416.651.6085 EMAIL: INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM

RB. FACEBOOK.COM, RUEMORGUEMAGAZINE TWITTER. TWITTER.COM, RUEMORGUE

STAFF

PUBLISHER
RODRIGO GUDIÑO
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
MONICA S. KUEBLER

ART DIRECTOR
SHANE MILLS

OPERATIONS COORDINATOR RICHELLE CHARKOT

FINANCIAL CONTROLLER MARCO PECOTA

INTERNS
JULIAN ARWEN
PATRICIA DAMEN
LAURA HOKSTAD

MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS MANAGER JODY INFURNARI PH: 905-985-0430 E: jody@rue-morgue.com

RUE MORGUE INTERNATIONAL

FABIEN DELAGE (FANCE) facebook.com/RueMorgueFrance CHARLOTTE STEAR (UK) facebook.com/RueMorgueUK AARON SOTO (MEXIX) facebook.com/RueMorgueMexico

CONTRIBUTORS

JENN ADAMS
BENOIT BLACK
JOHN W. BOWEN
JESSICA BUCK
JAMES BURRELL
PEDRO CABEZUELO
BRYAN CHRISTOPHER
JAY CLARKE
DEIRDRE CRIMMINS
PAUL CORUPE
ALEX DELLER
RICK HIPSON
KEN MICHAELS

LAST CHANCE LANCE
CAROLYN MAURICETTE
KEN MICHAELS
HATE MIOR
DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ
STACIE PONDER
PAIGE REYNOLDS
DANIEL ROBERTSON
TRACY ROBINSON
ROCCO T. THOMPSON
JEFF SZPIRGLAS
JUSTIN YOUNG

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

STAFF WRITER

ANDREA SUBISSATI

SEAN PLUMMER

ONLINE MANAGING EDITOR

ONLINE ASSISTANT EDITOR

GRACE DETWILER

SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER

STEPHEN PORTMAN

DAVE ALEXANDER

ASHLEA WESSEL

MAGILL FOOTE

RUE MORGUE TV

PROOFREADER
JEN MCKINNEY

WILLIAM J. WRIGHT

HEAD ONLINE WRITER
MICHAEL GINGOLD

AARON VON LUPTON

RUE MORGUE #213 would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of Ryan Couldrey, Matt Shotcha, Ismael Vicens, Tycho Nox Gudiño, Natalie del Nox and Al McMullan.

RUE MORGUE #213 is dedicated to the arrival of Ada Theodora, daughter of *RM* alum Justin Erickson and columnist Paige Reynolds. Welcome to the *Rue Morgue* family!

Cover: *The Breach*Design by Shane Mills

Rue Morgue magazine is published bi-monthly and accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, art or other materials. Freelance inquiries can be submitted at Rue-Morgue.com.

Government Canada

RUE MORGUE Magazine #213 ISSN 1481 – 1103 Agreement No. 40033764 Entire contents copyright MARRS MEDIA INC. 2023. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN CANADA.



IN [RM#212], YOUR NOTE From Underground mentioned the unique challenges that come with making analog media in the digital age. This came after describing the odd looks thrown around for not only enjoying, but displaying any paraphernalia that skews toward the eerie or the odd. While I loved the whole issue, from Calvaire's overdue spotlight to the assorted Renfields – fingers crossed for just as much love for the *Last Voyage of the Demeter* this summer – I admit that snippet from the intro sticks with me the most. Scary things are happening right now. The steady devouring of all physical media by a nightmare horde of virtual-only experiences paid for by subscriptions that can snatch away the very thing you bought when you stop feeding it an endless fee. Censorship of people's lives, the banning of books, and now a bill that wants to consume and abuse every level of online communication and privacy are on the horizon. In the U.S. anyway. Hence the snail mail route. A letter is paper and ink. Tangible as a magazine or the *Necronomicon*. Put it in someone's hands and it can't be revoked, erased, or lost to the arbitrary opinion or penny-pinching of a stranger clicking a button. It's important now more than ever to have physical media - especially the kind that scares people. So, to whoever reads this, and to all the fantastic and freaky minds who make *Rue Morgue* shamble onto the magazine rack, please know it means everything to me and all the other weirdos that you do this job.

C.R KANE – ADDRESS WITHHELD

I LOVE YOUR MAGAZINE, guys, but was a bit sad to see Al art on the cover of *RM#209*. Hopefully this was a one-time experiment and you're not gonna support this (if you're unaware I recommend you read about how it's basically stealing artworks and photos of millions of artists without permission nor compensation). Not to mention there's plenty of great illustrators who actually do their own work, so no reason to give that spotlight to someone who relies on Al to do the artwork for them.

PRZEMYSLAW R. DEDELIS, VIA FACEBOOK

Rest assured that Rue Morgue will always work with the best artists and illustrators in the field! -Ed

I'VE BEEN LOOKING for a book that's a history of

horror magazines but all I can find is a history of *Famous Monsters*. Does anyone know if such a thing exists? Because if it doesn't, it should...

BOB JACOB, VIA FACEBOOK

I AM A LIFELONG HORROR NERD. I cut my teeth on the Universal Monsters, *Godzilla*, and *King Kong* as a very young child. However, I have been a subscriber since 2000 and have learned so much about horror from your magazine. Keep that creepy shit coming!

CHAD RADFORD, VIA FACEBOOK



WORKING FRONT DESK today so a few lucky clients get to see my new kickass *@RueMorgue* shirt.

@PAPERSTRTSOAP, VIA TWITTER

sorry I AM LATE TO THE GAME (pun intended) but I only recently came across *RM#207*. Did my eyes deceive me? A shout-out to Twitch in Note From Underground? Not Andrea Subissati. Not *Rue Morgue*. How is it that a publication so clearly dedicated to inclusion of women, indeed inclusion and respect for all in the horror and gaming

FIND RUE MORGUE ONLINE

f : FACEBOOK.COM/RUEMORGUEMAGAZINE
TWITTER.COM/RUEMORGUE

@ RUEMORGUEMAG

communities would even mention that platform. As described by the internet platform SVG, "the reality of Twitch is the pervasive nature of sexual harassment against female streamers, viewers and even employees of the company"? Okay, okay. It was only a mention and not an endorsement. I'll cut you a break there. But as an erudite and respected editor I have to assume you were well aware of Twitch's reputation when you included the mention. What gives?

JOEY WOLFE, VIA EMAIL

If I avoided every platform that had a history of harassment, my options would be few! Hateful conduct and harassment are against Twitch's terms of service, and and we hope it continues in its efforts in implementing them and making the platform a safer space for streamers. -Ed

BEEN A LISTENER OF the Faculty of Horror podcast for years, which was my gateway to Rue Morgue, my only regret is that I should have subscribed years ago. Everything is thoughtfully written, the different departments are creative and fresh, and they aren't afraid to challenge readers or themselves. Keep up the amazing work!

MARK BERTON, VIA FACEBOOK

RE: "FRIGHT NIGHT PART 2" on Rue Morgue TV – This is a very underrated sequel! We love this film! You love horror so much and it really shows in your awesome reviews! Rue Morgue should give you a raise, because "You're so cool, Yasmina!"

@HORRORADDICTSTV, VIA YOUTUBE

RE: "THE FINAL DESTINATION" on Rue Morgue TV — Thank you to @ScareAlex and @RueMorgue for getting me through this workday. I was just saying the other day that I usually defend fourth installments in franchises... This is not one of them.

@BOOKSFREEZERPOD, VIA TWITTER





CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

American statesman Gouverneur Morris died in 1816 from an infection caused by using a whalebone to clear a urinary blockage.

The gas station segment of the 1993 anthology *Body Bags* takes place on the outskirts of Haddonfield, Illinois.

During the Witch Trials in 17th century Iceland, twenty of the 22 confirmed executions were carried out on men, the last one in 1683.

Christopher Lee cited 1968's *The Devil Rides Out* to be his favourite Hammer film.

Last year, a man died after accidentally stabbing himself during a car crash. It was later discovered he was using a knife to mix protein powder while driving and the fatal injury occurred when his airbag deployed.

Both this year's *Evil Dead Rise* and the 2013 remake were shot almost entirely in chronological order to alleviate issues with blood and gore continuity.

Cotard's syndrome, or "walking corpse syndrome," is a disorder where one believes they are either not alive or their appendages are dead, dying or missing.

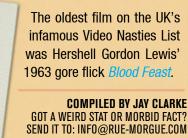
John Cusack and Nicholas Cage both auditioned for 1983's *Christine*, for the roles of Archie Cunningham and Buddy, respectively.

The Loch Ness Monster's scientific name is *Nessiteras rhombopteryx*, which also happens to be an anagram for "monster hoax by Sir Peter S."

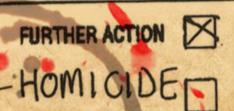
Just under half of the \$19-million-dollar budget of *The Blob*'s 1988 remake was spent on the special effects.

Venustraphobia is described as the fear of beautiful women.

Murder Inc., an organized crime group under the employ of a national syndicate, carried out an estimated 400-1000 contract killings during the 1930s and '40s.



RECORDING OFFICER



EXPIRING MINDS...

ON RUE MORGUE'S SOCIAL MEDIA

What horror movie would make a great video game, and why?

Climax. Dance Dance Revolution style with elements of Myst.

@XJUSTINXALCATRAZX, VIA INSTAGRAM

Hellraiser would make a great action RPG! Tons of puzzles, characters and mythology to explore.

KEVIN PALL, VIA FACEBOOK

From Beyond; your ultimate goal is to stop Dr. Pretorius from coming back into this dimension. Meanwhile, your pineal gland is trying to burst through your forehead and @barbaracrampton is chasing you through a hospital in a dominatrix outfit.

HUMAN BEING, VIA TWITTER

Hostel! I can't be the only one who wants to be a millionaire to buy some people to cut off in little pieces.

ORNELA CRESPO, VIA FACEBOOK

FINAL WORDS
AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



"VINCENT PRICE TOOK THE GAME OF 'GUESS WHO' TO ITS INEVITABLE MACABRE CONCLUSION."

THIS MONTH'S CAPTION CONTEST WINNER IS

JAMES ERICKSON, VIA FACEBOOK

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for a chance to have your Final Words!

CARL TANZLER AND HIS DEAD GIRLFRIEND

To call Jörg Buttgereit's 1988 exploitation flick *Nekromantik* con-

troversial would be one of the universe's great understatements. This German import leans so heavily into depictions of necrophilia that, along with some other purposefully taboo elements, it was banned in multiple countries. The film's defenders point to the film's subversive, satirical elements, while critics point out that, well, it's damned disturbing and super gross. But, as history reminds us, real life is often both those things as well.

For proof, one need only look to Buttgereit's fellow countryman, Carl Tanzler. Born in Dresden, Germany, in 1877, Tanzler emigrated to Florida with his family in 1926 but abandoned them in 1927 to work as a radiology technician in Key West. It was here that he met Maria Elena Milagro de Hoyos, a tuberculosis patient at his hospital who looked just like the "exotic, dark-haired woman" that the stricken technician claimed his ancestors showed him in his dreams as a young man.

Tanzler quickly became obsessed with de Hoyos, bringing his X-ray machine to her

home to provide haphazard medical care while also giving her jewelry and clothes. But when she died at the age of 22, his obsession continued; after convincing her family to take measures that would preserve her body, Tanzler visited de Hoyos' corpse every day for two years until the fateful night he decided to abscond with her with the aid of a toy wagon.

After touching up the body with a funeral mask, some wire, glass eyes, and a lot of perfume, Tanzler moved de Hoyos' corpse to his bed and lived with it for the next seven years. People naturally became suspicious when he suddenly stopped visiting the mausoleum and was spotted dancing in his house with what looked like a life-size doll. When de Hoyos' sister confronted Tanzler about it, he happily told her the truth.

Arrested and tried for grave destruction and corpse theft, charges were dropped as the statute of limitations had passed for those crimes. And while two doctors present at de Hoyos' autopsy in 1940 discovered that Tanzler had inserted a vaginal tube to make intercourse possible, they elected not to reveal this sordid detail at his trial. As a result, he eluded the label of necrophiliac and actually



became known as something of a hopeless romantic to the public at the time.

So why do people make films like *Nekro-mantik* seemingly for shits and giggles when people like Carl Tanzler exist? For some, these films provide space to peer into the dark corners of our collective psyches and sit with some uncomfortable realizations about human nature. Art may not be safe, but neither is reading the news!

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ...

Giovanni Frezza, Bob Boyle from *House by* the Cemetery (1981)

Any Italian horror fan worth their salt will no doubt remember blue-eyed and blonde-haired child actor Giovanni Frezza from his appearance in several horror films of the early '80s, most notably as the squeaky-voiced Bob in Lucio Fulci's House by the Cemetery. Frezza's voice in the movie was not his own, however, but a consequence of the unfortunate and often terrible dubbing practices of the Italian film industry — a fact for which he repeatedly apologizes at his frequent convention appearances. After notable roles in

Fulci's *Manhattan Baby* and Lamberto Bava's *Demons*, Frezza left the film business behind at age thirteen and went on to earn a degree in physics and a black belt in Kung Fu. He now lives in Chicago with his wife and three children and works as a product development manager for Molex, an electronics manufacturer (possibly devising better voice-dubbing technology).

JAY CLARKE



NEEUFUL THINGS

GEEKI TIKIS HORROR MINI MUGLETS \$72.99 USD

Just in time for tiki season, TOYNK has released a 4-pack of Geeki Tiki ceramic shot glasses, featuring the likenesses of Jason Voorhees, Freddy Krueger, Pennywise and Reagan. Stored in a collectible haunted house collector case, the muglets hold about two ounces each and are dishwasher and microwave safe – though we can't say the same for your liver!

Toynk.com

CHUCKY MINI BLUETOOTH SPEAKER \$19.99 USD

What Chucky lacks in height, he more than makes up for in evil – same goes for this Bitty Boomers Bluetooth speaker that delivers maximum sound in a tiny package! Standing at 2-inches in height and powered by voodoo, this mini speaker can play four hours of music on a single charge and also doubles as a selfie remote, making it a portable and handy friend to the end!

Bittyboomers.com

MISS BONES OVEN MITTS SET \$20 USD

Whether you're baking meat pies of questionable origin or the Homicidal Homemaker's latest culinary creature, Sourpuss has you covered! Protect your metacarpals with a ghastly pair of oven mitts, made of recycled cotton fill with loops for hanging. Your claws will thank you!

Sourpussclothing.com

SKYLIGHT GLASS TRINKET BOX \$42.99 USD

Something wicked this way comes! Store your beloved trinkets the way the three mothers might in a statement metal and glass box inspired by Dario Argento's *Suspiria*. Measuring 7 x 7 inches and featuring a hinged lid with chain, it's a touch of technicolour Italian opulence for your countertop altar.

Killstar.com

SATANIC GOAT HEAD MESH CAPE \$54.95 USD

Worshipping the Dark One never looked so good! Conjure your inner devil with Kreepsville's new mesh cape, featuring a Baphomet print and a crochet fringed hem – perfect for the pool, the beach, or your next ritual sacrifice.

Kreepsville666.com





WICKED THINGS BY VON DESOLATE

"Wicked things for wicked creatures"? Sounds right up our alley! An online boutique of handmade, one-of-a-kind spooky jewellery, Von Desolate is essentially Halloween made wearable. As described by sole artisan and proprietor Christina Doukas, "Von Desolate is dark and moody, spooky but very elegant, bewitching. I'd put skulls, spiders, coffins, snakes, bats, on everything — and usually do!"

Indeed, a cursory perusal of her wares reveals a gallery of ghoulish gems and coffin-shaped cabochons, gripped by skeletal hands or batwinged bezels. Her most popular items are dagger rings, worn like claws or finger armour, and her Kreepsakes (creepy keepsakes) that include a removable vial for wearers to carry something special with them: perhaps ashes or other genetic material.

A one-woman operation from start to finish, Von Desolate has amassed a devoted following on social media thanks to short videos of Doukas' unique approach to jewellery-making, from soldering and blackening the silver to installing the stones.

"It started as a hobby, actually," she tells *Rue Morgue*. "I was a stay-at-home mom for many years. As my son got older, I wanted something more to do with my time, something I could do from home, most importantly. I somehow found the art/jewelry community on Instagram and really wanted to give it a try, went to my local craft store, grabbed some charms, chains, wires, beads. It wasn't enough, I wanted to do so much

more, and work with metal. Working with silver is where my dark little heart is happiest."

But Doukas isn't the only one made happy by her unique designs, where silver skulls and spiderwebs are barely discernable through cloudy stones, like the glazed eyes of a long-dead ghost.

"A lady wanted a custom piece done with an antique cuff that had belonged to her mother," she recalls. "I deconstructed it, took the stones out, and rebuilt another cuff with those parts. Added some spooky to it, of course!"

Working out of her home studio since 2014 with the help of her familiar, Omen Von Kitty ("a living, permanent, Halloween decoration"), Von Desolate is finery fit for a fiend!

Find it at Saturn Return vintage shop in Richmond, Virginia, or online at *vondesolate.com*.

he will be the in the first be about a few of the first be a state of the first be and the first between the first betwe

ANDREA SUBISSATI



CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

LUMINATORS NEON MONSTERS MODEL KITS

(Monogram Models, Inc., 1991-92)

When iconic hobby company Aurora Plastics Corporation ceased operations in the late 1970s, many of the moulds for its classic model kits were acquired by competitor Monogram Models, Inc. Among these were moulds for Aurora's beloved line of Universal Monsters figural kits from the 1960s, and Monogram re-released the models several times throughout the 1980s and '90s. In 1991, Monogram tried something different by issuing five of the Universal characters — Dracula, the Frankenstein Monster, the Wolf Man, the Mummy, and the Phantom of the Opera, along with King Kong — in a line dubbed *the Luminators*

Neon Monsters. Cast in brightly coloured, seethrough styrene plastic, the figures (which stood between eight to nine ¼ inches in height) would glow in the dark with the use of a black light. No paint was required, but the kits still needed glue for assembly, and included a mail-away offer to purchase a "Luminators Black Light" to use with the models. Still sealed kits can fetch around \$30-\$40 apiece on eBay.

JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORGUE.COM



egular readers of *Rue Morgue* may know that, aside from overseeing all things *RM*, I also make horror movies. My latest, *The Breach*, was shot in 2020 during the dark days of the pandemic and is finally seeing wide release this July in North America, English-speaking Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Although I typically write my own scripts, for *The Breach* I collaborated with author Nick Cutter (*The Troop*, *The Deep*) who we've covered in these pages before. As with so many people before him, I discovered Nick (real name Craig Davidson) through the pages of *Rue Morgue*, and I was excited at the possibility of working together.

The script that was handed to me on a late summer's day back in 2020 was different than what ended up on the screen. But the core of it was there: a mystery wrapped in monstrous shades of H.P. Lovecraft, goopy body horror and the occult. I was hooked.

The Breach tells the story of police chief John Hawkins (Allan Hawco) who finds himself in the middle of an enigma the day a canoe carrying a boneless, mutilated body washes up on the shores of the local river. ID reveals the victim to be one Cole Parsons (Adam Kenneth Wilson), an eccentric particle physicist who only months prior had chartered a boat to a remote house in the woods. Now, along with Meg (Emily Alatalo) – charter boat captain and Hawkins' ex squeeze – and Jacob (Wesley French), the town coroner and also Meg's ex (hey, this is a small town), Hawkins sets off to locate the house and see what answers lie therein.

What the trio find in the unusually dilapidated edifice only compounds the mystery of what Parsons was getting up to in the woods. After his estranged wife appears, also looking for answers, and Jacob begins to show signs of bodily changes, it's not long before the monsters creep out of the shadows and into the full light of day.

In making *The Breach* I also collaborated with my friend Slash of Guns N' Roses fame, who wrote original music for the film and executive produced [see sidebar on p.16]. I am excited to introduce *The Breach* to *RM* readers. Craig and I recently caught up to interview each other and look back on the experience. I hope you enjoy our movie as much as we did making it.

Rodrigo Gudiño: Hi Craig, thanks for doing this. Do you remember the first kernel of an idea that made you think that The Breach was a story worth pursuing?

Craig Davidson: I've always been interested in, I guess, the Mad Scientist trope. Even better is one where the man or woman of science starts with maybe a good and noble objective, but hubris and obsessiveness and so on – the more odious aspects of the scientific mindset –





Weirdest Science: The discovery of a boneless corpse leads to puzzling physics that opens a cosmic can of worms in **The Breach.**

begin to intrude, and from there things bleed into chaos. I liked the idea of a body showing up in a remote northern location, and a trip into the wilderness to figure out what happened. So you're looking at shades of, well, a lot of stuff, but as diverse as Heart of Darkness and Frankenstein to From Beyond to The Edge of Running Water. And my fiction, the Cutter books, tend to invoke Lovecraft a fair bit, so this idea that there are realms neighbouring our own with hungry, callous creatures who'd drive a person mad to even sense their existence, creatures who are often trying to find ways into our world, or will take that opportunity if someone is so foolish as to open a gateway. Hopefully not too spoiler-iffic, but I think it's still vague enough.

Craig: Here's a question for you – a film is

a collaborative effort, and the director often tailors the script to his or her own aesthetic and the ideas they'd like to pursue. You made some really interesting and valuable additions to the script that lan [Weir] and I wrote. What guided you through that process, both aesthetically and in terms of your own fascinations?

Rodrigo: The first order of business for me with this script was connecting to it in a way that I felt I could do justice to the material. And the most interesting bit, for me, was that Lovecraftian element, so I wanted to have the story lean into those aspects more overtly. The script called for monsters and transformations, and I knew I needed to make sure I could pull those moments off creatively, so I tweaked things here and there



Goo Goo Muck: Director Rodrigo Gudiño on set with a few ghastly friends.

to make sure I could. I was also tasked with bringing the script down to earth as it were, and by that I mean making sure that it was specific to our budget. That consideration was strictly pragmatic and led me to cutting down a few action sequences toward the end and condensing the story to less locations. But with each rewrite I felt I got a better handle on the story, and eventually I began to see how I could bring it to life. Ultimately, all that rewriting served as visualization exercises that were necessary to get the movie into my head.

Rodrigo: Okay, now for you — how different was the process of writing in script form versus writing a novel. Did you find it in any way restrictive?

Craig: I think it's a different muscle, for sure, and I think some novelists (probably including myself at the outset) don't properly acknowledge that there's actually a wide gulf between writing a novel and a screenplay. I'm sure there are screenwriters who've fallen into the same trap going the other way, too. Both have their limitations, but for me, a lifelong book reader but not a screenplay reader – I only started reading screenplays once I figured I'd try to write one – it was a matter of what I couldn't do in a screenplay. Obviously, there's no interiority. You can't really get in a character's head other than voiceover, which is generally a no-no, so you have to find ways via dialogue or other techniques to get at a character's mindset; obviously, an actor's performance will drill down to that, too, but

that's something more usually handled on set, I think, as an interplay between those actors, as well as the director, which is a process that the screenwriter is usually not on hand for. Also, as you mentioned, there's an issue of budget. Every novel I've ever written is probably a \$100 million movie, but I never stopped to think about that while writing them, because why would I? But then it's a matter – and for me, this came from talking to more experienced screenwriters (and here I mean specifically my co-writer lan Weir, who I split writing and creative duties with 50/50 down the line) who had that idea of scene feasibility vis-a-vis budget in mind - of how can you tell this story in a clever, creative way that is cost-conscious? That becomes a matter of altering key scenes from a novel in hopes of retaining their core elements while re-jiggering them out of a need to not spend \$10 million on five minutes of film time. So it's great not to worry about all that when writing a book; there's no *need* to let that be a worry, but that's where some inventiveness and creative thinking needs to come into play when trying to retrofit a book for a screen adaptation. Some of that is done in the script stage, and as you say, more of it happens during the line production and ultimately with you, as the director.

Craig: My turn. You've had a varied career, spanning a lot of different creative endeavours. While you seem comfortable helming a magazine, a horror convention, etc., would you say that film directing is most challenging – but potentially the most rewarding, too?

Rodrigo: In fact, directing a film resembles a lot of what I've been doing with Rue Morgue over the years - collaborating with people to create something that aligns with what I envision in my head. But making movies is kind of the extreme version of that premise; the amount of concentrated creative energy that goes into every facet is overwhelming at the best of times, not least because production schedules are so slim. Ironically, I've found that the toughest part about making a movie is sitting with the idea for years at a time, and going over and over it with different people to gradually, painstakingly, bring it to life. At some point in that drawn-out process, it is easy to lose your bearings, so it is certainly a challenge unlike any other. The Breach was unusual, I guess, because it felt quick to me, probably because I didn't write it. On the other hand, the highs of making a movie are pretty high, and there are few things like the thrill of collaborating with such a wide array of creative disciplines to bring a story to life.

Rodrigo: Here's something I've been meaning to ask you for a long time. You are known for grossing out your readers. What's the key to a good gross out?

Craig: Hah, excellent question! Well, to a degree that's weirdly a matter of taste. Bad taste, most likely. Y'know, there are some writers or film-makers who mix elements of sadism or sexual depravity into their gross-out concoction. Rob Zombie's early stuff is probably what I'm thinking of there. There are those who go for kind of



ROCK GOD SLASH ADDS HIS MUSICAL CHOPS TO THE BREACH AND TEAMS UP WITH RODRIGO GUDIÑO FOR A BRAND NEW HORROR MOVIE PRODUCTION COMPANY



ack in 2015, word got out that guitar icon Slash, of Guns N' Roses fame (along with side projects with the likes of Alice Cooper, Iggy Pop, Michael Jackson, to name a few), had joined our own president, Rodrigo Gudiño, to make a horror western. Alas, while that project has yet to see the light of day, the duo stayed in contact behind the scenes, largely due to Slash's love of the magazine you are currently holding in your hands. So it wasn't entirely a surprise when word came down the pipe that Gudiño's newest horror movie, *The Breach*, would include original music from the rock star, who also served as executive producer.

"It was a really interesting project," Slash tells *Rue Morgue*. "I'd had a couple of projects go by the wayside as a result of COVID [but] they managed to come up with the idea of finding a location and getting everybody isolated for the entire production out in the woods in Ontario somewhere. [*The Breach*] is the first project that I've been involved with that actually got completed, since the very first movie I ever made. And that was during COVID, which is ironic."

That first movie is the 2013 horror flick *Nothing Left to Fear*, which Slash executive produced and wrote an original score for. Savvy readers might know that he also recorded original music for the little-known

Quentin Tarantino-produced horror comedy *Curdled* from 1996. Or that the veteran rocker just announced a new horror movie production company (more on that later). So it's a bit puzzling to hear him say that his involvement in movies came as a bit of an accident.

"I've always had a passion for horror stuff," says Slash, "I just never had any aspirations to get involved in the movie business. And then a producer came to me at one point — we hung out at a Halloween party, and talked horror into the wee hours of the morning. He suggested that I become a producer. It just never occurred to me. And so we started going over scripts in short order, right after that. And it's something that I'm very passionate about. I do music, and I'm always making records, and I'm always on the road. But on the flip side of that I'm all about making movies."

For *The Breach*, Slash went a step further; not only did he produce the film, he also wrote and recorded a lush and transcendental score for the movie, composed of acoustic guitar themes that follow the initial sojourn into the isolated Canadian woods, and a bombastic guitar rock anthem that he recorded with Turkish/ German composer Aybars Altay. (The film also contains original music from frequent Gudiño collaborator James Zirco Fisher.)

"I really loved the story," says Slash. "I started coming up with ideas for the music based off the script. And then when they were sending me the various scenes that I was scoring for, I sort of had an idea of the vibe. The actual visuals really provided a certain kind of aura."

The score for *The Breach* is on a different level than Slash's original score for *Nothing Left to Fear*, which remains hauntingly beautiful and proved he had the chops to delve into a mature sound, creating lush and eerie melodies (including his signature guitar riffs, naturally) that truly complemented the visuals onscreen.

Slash admits that his involvement with that film was born purely out of his desire to pull the horror genre out of what he believed to be a bleak time (if you think the film industry is vapid and derivative now, just remember that films like *Texas Chainsaw 3D* and *I Spit on Your Grave 2* came out that year). Still, jumping into the role of producer proved to be a bold move, a baptism by fire.

"[Nothing Left to Fear] was the type of experience that should have made me run away," he recalls. "It was just a very hard movie to make, you know; insurmountable obstacles. It's amazing that the movie actually did get finished. But for some reason, the process really spoke to me, and so I've been doing it ever since. I've had a lot of great projects fall apart right at the finish line, or at the tail end of development. But you just hang in there and keep at it."

"RIGHT THIS SECOND IS ACTUALLY A PRETTY HEALTHY TIME FOR HORROR."

- SLASH

That spirit of tenacity is at work with Slash and Gudiño's new horror movie production company, BerzerkerGang, co-founded with Raven Banner Entertainment and Hangar 18 Media, both of whom were involved in making *The Breach*. With BerzerkerGang, the co-conspirators envision a cinematic landscape that embraces storytelling and emphasizes character-driven narratives. Slash insists that he believes in crafting horror stories that exist on multiple levels, delving into the depths of psychological terror, and cites flicks such as *Mandy*, *Malignant*, and *Heridtary* as recent examples of the genre done right.

"Right this second is actually a pretty healthy time for horror," he says. "In the '70s, I thought that it was a really great time for feature-length-dramas that just happened to be about subjects that made them horrific. It wasn't like horror for horror's sake; there were these really great stories that were really scary, but they were regular feature movies that were just like any other drama that was coming out at the time. Every few months, you have some horror movies that come out that are sort of mainstream. And they're usually very hit or miss, usually more





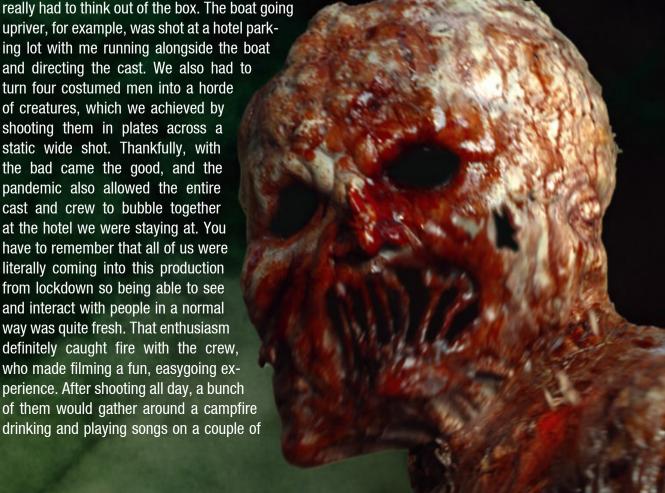
Portal Of The Damned: Mad science blends with the occult to open a doorway where humans enter... but emerge as something else entirely.

Which is fine! I mean, if you option your IP, it's kind of like selling your baby... and if you're the sort of person who's willing to sell their baby, you have to deal with the consequences! Ideally, it's in the hands of a creative team who has the vision and understanding to get it to a place that's best for all of you – to turn it into a film, ideally a memorable one, but just getting something up on the screen is an enormous accomplishment in a lot of situations. So yes, I think that for me, if I want to be involved creatively with the development of one of my novels, well, that's a tricky negotiation because there's a lot of insider baseball stuff and creative egos and just a lot of money at stake, so it's easy to get squeezed out of your own work - or maybe more fairly-speaking, to step aside and leave it in the hands of a more seasoned or successful screenwriter, or else a younger passionate one who has a vision for how to get your book up on screen that you yourself don't have. In the end, the real "win" is to get the film made. So sometimes that win involves you leaving your vulnerable little baby in more experienced but ideally loving hands.

Craig: Back at you - how was The Breach in terms of a film set? I feel like it was a blast, from everything I've heard. The actors, the crew, you were a tight-knit team - especially as it was filmed during the pandemic. Talk a little about the experience, and how you got some of those memorable shots.

Rodrigo: I didn't know quite what to expect when I took on this project in the middle of the pandemic – I guess no one really knew. I thought that with nobody on the streets, I would have every location I dreamed of at my disposal but in fact the opposite was true. Because of the restrictions, we were not able to secure any public spaces and had to cobble locations together from a series of private properties. Of course, that was only the tip of the iceberg; we really had to think out of the box. The boat going upriver, for example, was shot at a hotel parking lot with me running alongside the boat and directing the cast. We also had to turn four costumed men into a horde of creatures, which we achieved by shooting them in plates across a static wide shot. Thankfully, with the bad came the good, and the pandemic also allowed the entire cast and crew to bubble together at the hotel we were staying at. You have to remember that all of us were literally coming into this production from lockdown so being able to see and interact with people in a normal way was quite fresh. That enthusiasm definitely caught fire with the crew, who made filming a fun, easygoing experience. After shooting all day, a bunch

guitars. A few even made up some songs about what happened on the shoot, it was really fun. Ultimately the pandemic was a great leveller in that it got rid of the hierarchy that typifies sets there were no trailers or special treatments, everyone just had a job to do and we worked together to make it happen. So it was quite unique; the way movies are seldom made these days I think. 🚱





INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 27th EDITION JULY 20 TO AUGUST 9, 2023 MONTREAL WWW.FANTASIAFESTIVAL.COM



Montréal **₩**

Québec !!!

Frontières





International Co-Production Market

FRONTIÈRES MARKET July 26-29, 2023

FRONTIÈRES FORUM July 26-28, 2023

frontieresmarket.com

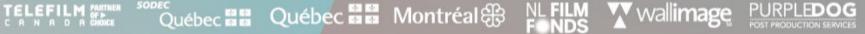


















SURVIVE THE SURVIVE THE

w andrea subissati



dusty gas station; a sun-scorched porch; a ghastly mobile of hanging human bones. Suddenly, a grinding, mechanical screech pierces the air and a chainsaw revs ominously in the distance. Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* brought horror fans into an environment so immersive, you could smell the stench of death. This August, Gun Interactive invites fans to become family with a brand-new asymmetrical nightmare based on a film that changed the game; *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, 'A Mutliplayer Horror Game Based on True Events.'

"Texas Chain Saw Massacre is a very visual film," affirms Ronnie Hobbs, Gun's creative director. "At its time, it was doing camerawork and up-close shots and things that you typically saw overseas that really hadn't penetrated the American market. The way that they shot that film was gritty and it was real, but there were so many beautiful scenes outside and the colour palettes. It was beautiful and grotesque and weird all at the same time. That always stood out to me, is how beautiful of a film it was, so I knew if we were going to make a Texas Chain Saw Massacre game and it was gonna be set in Texas that it needed to actually look like it was set in Texas."

to be authentic, it has to be exactly like the subject matter," affirms Wes Keltner, Gun's CEO and president. "Because when you make a horror game, you never want the player to be pulled out of the immersion."

"I KNEW IF WE WERE GOING TO MAKE A TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE GAME AND IT WAS GONNA BE SET IN TEXAS THAT IT NEEDED TO ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE IT WAS SET IN TEXAS."

- RONNIE HOBBS, GUN INTERACTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Of course, there's more to a good game than a pretty-looking checkerboard to play it on. While it might have been simpler to toss some random wayward teenagers at a lumbering, demented Leatherface and watch the fur fly, Gun seeks to

offer *TCM* players the chance to essentially direct and star in their own fanfic episode by introducing a unique plotline and some new characters among the usual suspects. Taking place five months before the events of the original film, the game concerns missing student photographer Maria Flores, whose car was found abandoned along Country Road 172. Her younger sister Ana has gathered some of Maria's college friends to help look for her, but they encounter a family reunion of another sort...

"You've heard the story before about how people run out of gas and they get murdered, right? We didn't want that," explains Hobbs of creating a novel storyline for the game. "We needed a reason for the family to come into contact with a new set of victims. We wanted to do something a little more interesting."

"Each match should feel like a little mini film," adds Keltner. "We always talk about players almost like actors in terms of: we give you the tools and the environment in the world to act in the roles we provide, and if you act those roles appropriately, you're going to create a genuine slasher movie. It's going to happen. But it's the player's decisions within that can turn the tide and make [each] match feel completely differ-

ent, make it feel like you've watched a different film this time."

Having put a big red bloody tickmark next to setting oblivious teens in deadly peril, Hobbs and Keltner set their sights on the all-important troupe of demented, bloodthirsty killers. The gang's all here, from the greasy hitchhiker to the two-faced cook to the silent but deadly Leatherface, plus two new playable killers to round out the Slaughter family ranks. Yes, you read that right — the *Slaughter* family. Did we mention these guys are superfans?

"I hate to be the one that said this to you, but in the original film, they were the Slaughters," says Ronnie, with the sheepish grin of the reluctant know-it-all. "You would be shocked that like 99% of people do not know that. The only time you see the Slaughter name is 'W.E. Slaughter' at the gas station. People think that says, 'we slaughter,' like it's a funny pun, but it's actually 'W.E. Slaughter,' which is his name, and they change the name to Sawyers in the sequel. It's in the script, and you would only know that if you saw the script, so don't feel bad."

(9)

(

It's hard to feel bad about being corrected when it provides such assurance that this game is clearly in the right hands; not only those of Gun's committed team, but of *TCM* co-writer Kim Henkel, who served as an invaluable resource to the game's development, particularly in the addition of two new Slaughter family members making their franchise debut [see sidebar].

"WE KNEW THAT WE WERE HELPING TO CREATE A NEW GENRE."

- WES KELTNER, GUN INTERACTIVE CEO

"Working with Kim, he handed us the character bible and he said, 'Here's all these characters that no one knows about,'" says Hobbs. "It's really interesting to read some of that stuff and then of course, working with him every step of the way on making sure he's happy with the way they look and their backstory and how they fit into the family. He's very particular on making sure you don't know a whole lot, you know just enough about them that you can't place them in certain parts. It's kind of a very clever thing that he does with his characters — he keeps them ambiguous, in a way."

Any further doubt that *TCM* isn't getting the white-apron treatment need look no further than Gun's previous smash hit, 2017's *Friday the 13th: The Game*, as testimony; a title that



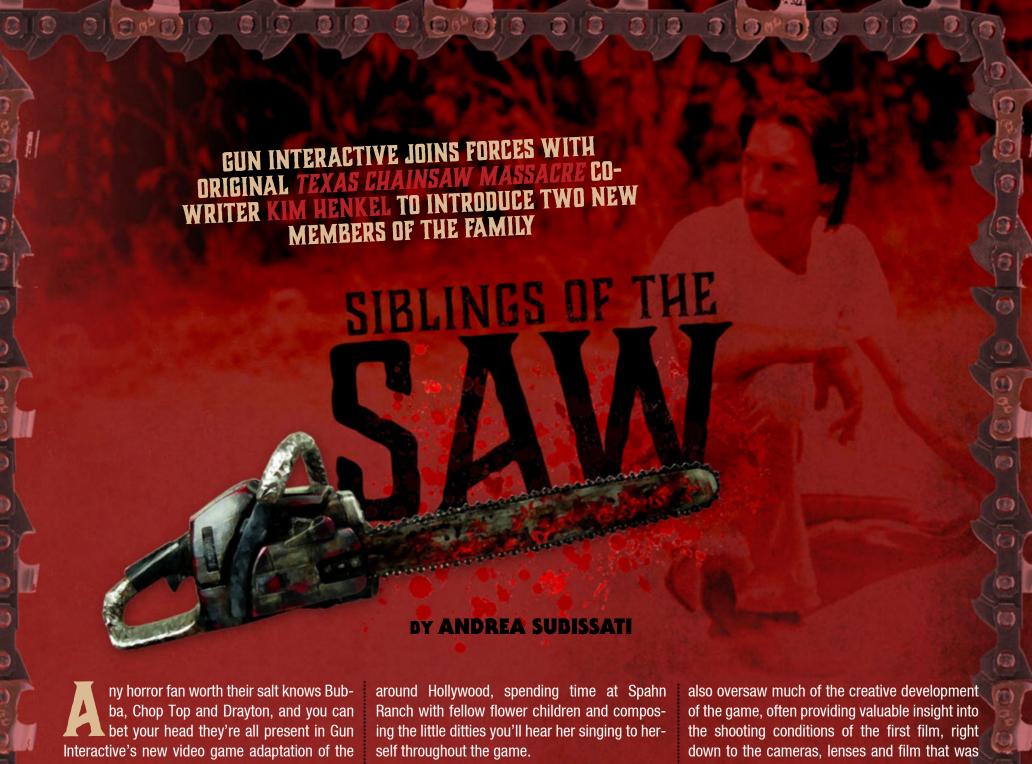


The Gun Is Family: Having established genre movie IP as fertile ground for asymmetrical horror gameplay, Gun Interactive pushes cinematic immersion even further for **Texas Chain Saw Massacre**.

not only broke the mould of successful IP crossovers, it also broke Gun's own servers due to its massive popularity. In it, players donned either the iconic goalie mask (or burlap sack) to mow down camp counsellors, or the doomed sneakers of the counsellors themselves as they fought to survive horror's favourite holiday. An exclusively online multiplayer game, each match of seven players (one stalker and six stalkees) offered numerous tools and mechanisms for players to personalize their experience, with no one match unfolding quite like the last. The format took the horror gaming world by storm, elevating the asymmetrical horror survival game to proper subgenre status.

"We knew that we were helping to create a new genre," says Keltner. "It wasn't like asymmetry was new, that's been around for a long time in video games, but asymmetric multiplayer horror wasn't. We're now the grandfathers of that, there's been so many other games. But we want to constantly push it forward, we want to always innovate on the thing, because why get out of bed and just keep making the same thing every time? What's the point? I guess if you're solely motivated by money and money alone, that's what you would do, just cut, copy, paste, over and over until people stop buying it. But that's not why we make games. We do this because we're passionate about our industry. We're passionate about horror, and we want to make unforgettable experiences."

To that end, the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* IP presented the perfect opportunity to push the envelope further by introducing not just one, but a whole family of five playable killers to the mix, each with their own tactics, techniques, personalities and quirks. The Hitchhiker, for example, makes use of his lanky frame by passing through narrow corridors, while the Cook's keen hearing can identify a limping victim from a room away. Shifting the asymmetry from a strict one-against-six format to two-or-three-against-four-or-five, the *TCM* game offers players the



ny horror fan worth their salt knows Bubba, Chop Top and Drayton, and you can bet your head they're all present in Gun Interactive's new video game adaptation of the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchise. Who you may not recognize are two new members of the demented family unit: Sissy Sunshine and Pretty Boy Johnny. While Gun's game marks their franchise debut, both characters were developed under the careful gaze of original *TCM* co-writer

Kim Henkel; in fact, Sissy appeared in Henkel's character bible for the original film but has never appeared in the series until now.

"I worked with Kim on a potential list of people that would fit in," says Gun creative director Ronnie Hobbs. "We wanted them to be completely different from the family but

also somehow fit in. And we have more potential ones that we haven't talked about yet, too."

Described by Hobbs as "half Juliette Lewis from *Natural Born Killers* and half Manson girl," Henkel's backstory for Sissy Sunshine saw her rebelling against the family business to drift

As for Pretty Boy Johnny, his debut was a practical decision by Gun and Henkel, who felt they needed a new family member who could easily infiltrate the outside world and seduce new victims that way. Charming in a Ted Bundy/Richard Ramirez kind of way, Johnny was

the key ingredient to Gun's new *TCM* storyline, where student photographer Maria Flores runs afoul of the charismatic killer, the catalyst for the rest of the sordid tale to unfold.

"He's kind of like the serial killer of the family, and he's just good looking enough that he can go out into small towns and blend in," Hobbs ex-

plains. "Maria is out looking for and photographing the bluebonnets and the flowers and that's when she runs into Johnny, who's one of the new members of the family, and that kicks off our game, essentially."

But more than the new characters, Henkel

also oversaw much of the creative development of the game, often providing valuable insight into the shooting conditions of the first film, right down to the cameras, lenses and film that was used. Gun CEO Wes Keltner was astonished at the accuracy of Henkel's memory from an indie set 49 years ago and considered him an invaluable resource to the development of the game, both in fleshing out the new family members and adding some all-important atmosphere.

"When you have someone like that that you can call, why would you not call and ask the questions? You have the guy, here!" he says, adding that Henkel stood right next to director Tobe Hooper throughout the shooting of *TCM*. "It's a shame we lost Hooper, would have been great to have talked to him too, but you got the guy that was standing right next to him and even helping co-direct

the film itself. So it was a blessing to be able to call him and [ask] "Why, in the first time that the camera approaches the house, did the camera tilt?' If you look at the key art in the game, the horizon's slightly shifted. These little things are all from being able to pick Kim's brain, and then inject that into everything that we did."



opportunity to team up and scheme together; a facet made even more immersive with innovative technology that sees the characters interacting with one another amid the carnage.

"When you walk around as the Hitchhiker or when you walk around as Leatherface or the Cook or any of our characters, including the victims, they have personalities and they have unique V.O. lines and they have unique animations," says Hobbs. "Our characters are actually talking to each other in the game, and especially the victims. When they see each other, they'll talk to each other; they know each other because of the story that we built. Because if you have two [killers] walking around hunting for victims, they're going to argue. 'This is all your fault! Look what you did!' It's like in the movie: 'Look what your brother did to the door!' There's a whole dysfunctional family aspect to Texas Chain Saw which makes it like a comedy (which a lot of people missed) but we took that and ran with it."

"It's a pretty robust system," Keltner elaborates, "because again, it goes right back to that individual [objective]: we have to keep them immersed. If we're not doing our job the right way, if we're phoning it in, if we're grabbing canned assets, or if we're not having these little quippy moments where two family members are talking to each other uniquely... it's all these little pieces weaving this tapestry that keeps the player tied in."

Another thread of *TCM*'s immersive tapestry was in the physical movements of the char-

acters themselves – from a victim's wounded hobble to the Cook's trotting gait, equal attention was paid to motion-capture techniques for maximum cinematic realism.

"The amount of time that we spend in motion capture is pretty close to what single player games spend in motion capture, because we want real performances," says Keltner, to which Hobbs adds: "You may not have even noticed this when you were playing as one of the female characters, but you were playing as Scout Taylor-Compton [star of Rob Zombie's Halloween reboot]; she did all the mo-caps for all of our females and so you were walking around as her. We wanted to give that extra level of finding someone who knows what it's like to escape in a movie while hurt and act like they're dying. So each of the [characters] is played by someone who does just as good of a job as Scout."

With the continuing success of horror movies-turned-video-games like *Alien: Isolation* (2014), *Blair Witch* (2019), and *Evil Dead: The Game* (2022), the ghouls at Gun are keenly aware that the survival horror game boom presents a lucrative business opportunity to keep stale IP's alive – Keltner admits that the company has been approached by several titleholders from a variety of cinematic genres to get the Gun Interactive treatment. But a perk of having the pick of the litter is choosing those

titles nearest and dearest to their horror-loving hearts, and doing it with the requisite amount of care and respect.

"When we made Friday the 13th, it was a bit of lightning in the bottle," admits Keltner. "It was the right time, right place, right IP; all the things sort of lined up for that. And I knew, the moment that everyone was playing it and we saw the success of it, that this was going to be a thing where Hollywood is going to scramble to figure out, 'Okay, let's dust off this old IP and find some dev company that's willing to build.' It doesn't take a futurist to know that's going to happen. So there's a bit of responsibility on our side, without sounding too egotistical. It's more like, if they're going to make a Texas Chain Saw game, I really hope we're the ones that do it because there are certain films that need this kind of treatment. It needs a white glove approach."



(

SHIN ULTRAMAN

'WORKS WONDERFULLY, RAISING SHIN 'ULTRAMAN'

There's never a dull day on Japan's newly established SSSP Kaiju defense taskforce, led by Kimio Tamura, played by DRIVE MY CAR's Hidetoshi Nishijima. After a particularly challenging encounter, a silver giant descends from the sky to rescue the planet. Dubbed Ultraman, this giant's identity and purpose are a mystery. SHIN ULTRAMAN is a delightful reimagining of one of Japan's classic superheroes, full of cosmic twists, charismatic villains, and giant Kaiju.

ROGER EBERT

"A SUPERIOR GIANT MONSTER MOVIE, REPLETE WITH COLORFUL REPTILIAN AND SQUID-LIKE MONSTERS!"



DIRECTED BY SHINDI HIGUCHI **RELEASE DATE:**

JULY 4TH, 2023 AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU RAY AND VOD PLATFORMS





-ITTENBACH FANS

WWW.CLEOPATRA-ENTERTAINMENT.COM

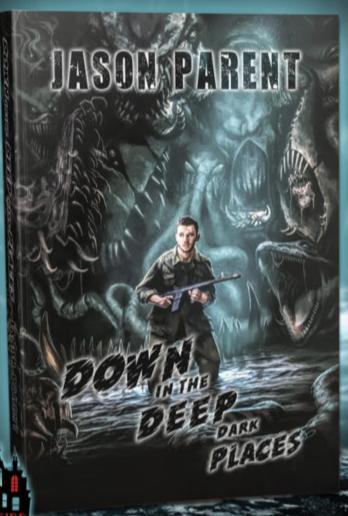
- GEEK GERMANY

This brutal backwoods splatter-gore film from horror master Nicolas Onetti takes us on a journey with an Anglo-American rock band - Billy Bob (Matías Desiderio, Palermo Hollywood), Jane (Clara Kovacic. The 100 Candles Game) and Mark (Juan Pablo Bishel) whose Van breaks down while on tour, leaving them stranded in a ghost town, not knowing what bloody terror awaits them.

> DIRECTED BY NICOLAS ONETTI

RELEASE DATE: JULY 18TH. 2023 AVAILABLE ON DVD. BLU RAY AND VOD PLATFORMS

200 Signed and numbered hardcover editions!



In this collection, Jason Parent gathers nineteen devilish tales (six never before published) that plunge the reader headfirst into a whirlpool of nightmares, each more terrifying than the last. From high up on the hills to far below the surface, from lush forest to barren desert to deepest sea to blackest space, a monstrous pilgrimage awaits those who travel these pages that blends horror, science fiction, and, at times, humor, in a way that will not leave visitors unscathed. The reader will journey alongside a wickedly diverse set of protagonists, making one thing abundantly clear: no matter who you are or where you may be, the darkness can and will find you.

· A castaway finds a terrible strength to survive, while another finds strength in thoughts of revenge.

· A desperate father turns to the supernatural as a means to be with his

A group of American soldiers finds there are worse things than insurgents beneath the mountains of Afghanistan.

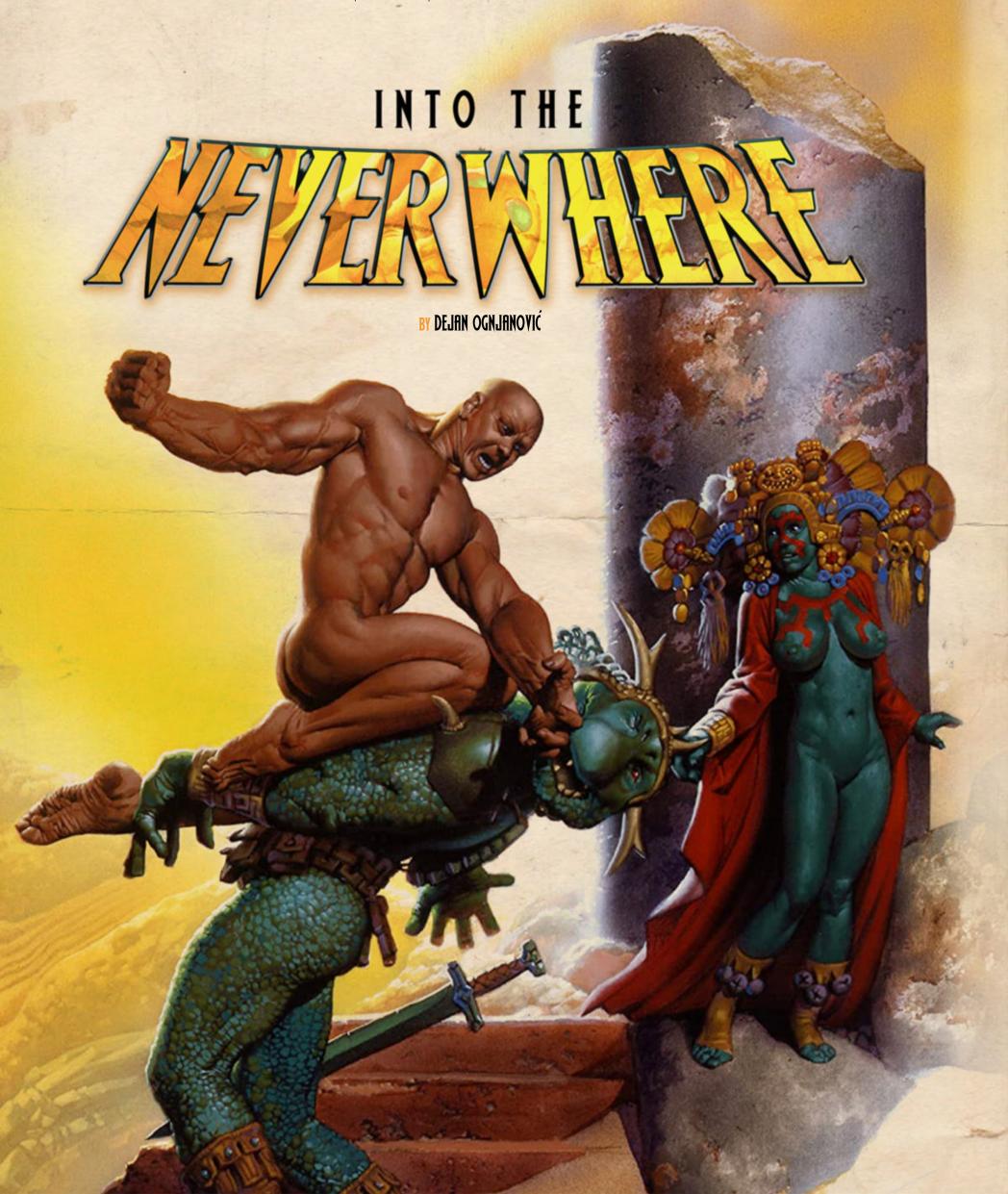
· A priest resists an unholy temptation from a strangely disfigured ward.

· An astronaut discovers that even in the emptiness of space, something will hear her scream.

Horrifying and hauntingly perverse, Parent's collection invites you to delve into deeper and darker places with every tale. How deep into the darkness will you go?

www.weirdhousepress.com

IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS, FEW HAVE MATCHED THE HYPERBOLIC HORROR OF LEGENDARY ARTIST RICHARD CORBEN. NOW, ONE OF THE MASTER FANTASIST'S MOST FAMOUS EPICS IS RESURRECTED



Richard Corben left an indelible mark on the fields of comics, graphic novels and illustrations before he died in 2020. A prolific artist, with a special predilection towards dark and edgy material, he is worshipped by horror fans because of his short comics in *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines, and those collected in *Spirits of the Dead*, but also due to his *Haunt of Horror* free adaptations of E. A. Poe's and H. P. Lovecraft's stories and poems, his tribute to Poe in *Shadows on the Grave*, his adaptation of W. Hope Hodgson's novel *The House on the Borderland*, and one-offs like *The Rat God*."

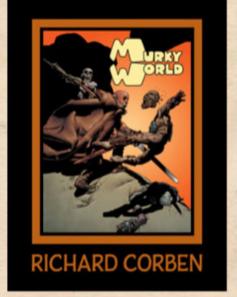
Even though Corben was an American, and thus fully immersed in the pop culture of that region, his pulp iconography seems strongly influenced by European artists; not only those from Heavy Metal (Metal Hurlant) magazine, but also older generations of painters, especially surrealists, such as Max Ernst. Corben was a genius of hyperbole: no one drew decay like Corben. His skeletons are the most skeletal, his corpses the wormiest. No one suggested the combination of flesh and flora, especially fungi, quite so gruesomely. His heroes are excessively muscular and endowed, his soft-skinned seductresses extremely busty, his lizard-men the most lizardy, his monsters as monstrous as can be humanly imagined. Both his shading and his colouring emphasized the third dimension: those hyperbolic images jumped off the pages and etched themselves into the readers' memory...

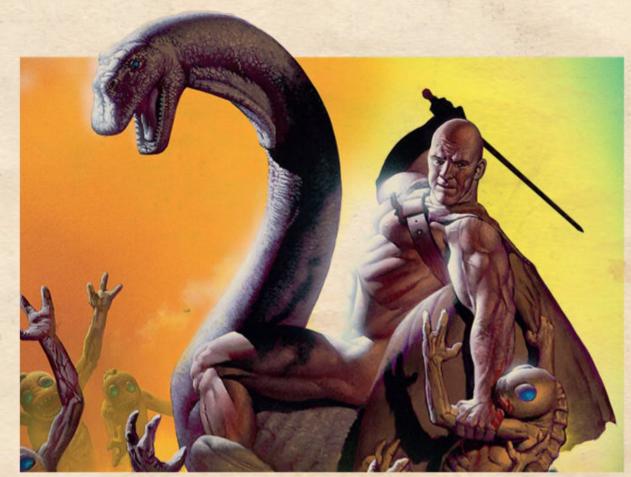
Nowhere is this truer than in the **Den** saga, a series of albums about the adventures of the titular nude, bald, muscle-bound hero in a land of ruins, evil sorcerers, perversions and monsters.

The *Den* saga has been long out of print and hard to come by, but this year, at last, Dark Horse started their Richard Corben Library. The first volume is *Murky World*, a sort of horror-fantasy cousin to *Den* (with a foreword by Mike Mignola, never-seen sketches and other extra material), while the second in the series is the long-awaited, now meticulously restored *Den: Neverwhere*. Corben's trusted collaborator José Villarrubia is responsible for re-animating the vivid colours, lost or mutated in previous editions.

"Den is the most remarkable achievement

in Corben's career and held a special place in his heart," says Villarrubia. "He invested all his considerable talent in this character, working on it for almost thirty years. As a result, *Den*'s world is a rich tapestry of different literary worlds, with elements of Barsoom, Hyborian Age, Neverland, and Oz. Den is a classic hero archetype, drawing inspiration from the tragic Greek heroes, but with a storyline that incorporates darkly





Muscles And Monsters: Transformed into a hairless and hulking hero in an alternate dimension, Den battles Martians, four-armed creatures and lizard men.

humorous elements."

In *Neverwhere*, a young man from contemporary America uses a device left to him by his missing uncle and stumbles through a dimensional warp into a bizarre desert otherworld where he is transformed into the titular Herculean hero who encounters lizard men and big bat-things before he comes across a creepy temple where a luscious high-priestess is about to sacrifice a young woman to a monstrous thing in the lake. He saves the woman, but they must still contend with various other monsters (apemen, insect-men, and many-eyed creatures) in close pursuit...

Villarrubia believes that what sets the *Den* series apart from Corben's other creations, aside from the emphasis on the horrific and grotesque, is that it was his most deeply personal project.

"[Den] gave him the freedom to unleash his creativity and imagination, allowing him to dream big and bring his vision to life in a variety of mediums," he says. "Through Den, Corben was able to explore different storytelling techniques,

experiment with different art styles and art materials, and express his ideas in new and exciting ways."

Corben may not be as well-known as he should be in his native United States, but he remains very popular and respected in Europe and most of Latin America. However, even those fans who have loved his work since they first read it years ago often don't realize how truly creative and experimental it was.

Villarrubia considers Corben "the most innovative comics creator of the 20th century," one who was able to incorporate classic fine arts skills with emerging technology of the time.

"I did not use those words lightly, or to be flattering," he affirms. "Most remember his incredible 3-D-looking art, voluptuous characters, and brilliant colour, but few realize how it was made. Because of his background in fine art (he had a BFA from Kansas City Art Institute), his decade of working in industrial animation, and his life-long commitment to live drawing from the figure, his art was informed by many sources unfamiliar to most cartoonists. He also dabbled in film and animation all his life. When various computer programs became available, he incorporated them into his comics when nobody else was."

Before Corben ever published comics, he was already an award-winning animator for his short semi-animated film *Neverwhere* (1968), about a decidedly non-heroic looking man (played by Corben himself) who is transferred into a night-marish high-fantasy realm and transformed into a hunky hero. The film was the origin of *Den: Neverwhere* (1978).

"Once he started working for comics that had better reproduction, he incorporated a large variety of methods into his image-making," says Villarrubia. "Going very far beyond the traditional pen and ink, he used mixed media, made fully painted art, added collages of photographs, and marbleized papers and elaborated his unique technique of hand-made colour separations. As early as 1978, he made a comic illustrated completely by collaged, often distorted photographs [*Ogre*]. This project showcased his hand-made figurines and sculptures, which he created and used consistently for reference in most projects.



By the early 1990s, he created 3-D-generated environments in series like *DenSaga* and fully digitally rendered color in series like *Denz*."

Corben reprinted the first two of *Den*'s under his company, Fantagor Press, which also published *Den 3*, *4*, *5*, and *DenSaga*. When the company went out of business in 1994, the artist started working commercially and doing work for hire, but those volumes became increasingly hard to find. Even before that, their ground-breaking technique was sometimes partially lost in translation through the printing process. For Villarrubia, the time was right to reproduce those hard to find volumes.

"Den required restoration now because colour printing has evolved since the comic was published decades ago," he explains. "In addition, Corben invented a very elaborate technique to colour his comics, hand drawing and painting each plate of the colour separations. This often gave very vibrant results but also led to some printing errors. And much of the detail of the original pages got lost, like textures and some rendering. Ten years ago, I asked Corben to help me restore the colour stories in Dark Horse's Creepy Presents Richard Corben, and he sent me many scans of his originals, which I used. He was thrilled with the results."

The process of reviving the vivid Neverwhere of picturesque temples, creatures and magic was challenging, but no one was better suited for the job than the experienced artist and colourist Villarrubia, who understood the importance of presenting *Den* as beautifully as possible.

"The greatest challenge was to get the best colour sources," he says. "Although the *Den* books have been printed many times, the colours are different in each edition. Some pages have never been printed properly at all. One cannot trust any edition without carefully looking at others. For the first volume, *Neverwhere*, the

best sources were the first edition (Ariel Books) and the first European Edition (Catalan Communications). For the second one, *Muvovum*, the first edition (Catalan Communications) is instead very poorly printed, very pale, and desaturated, and I had to look at others, as well as the *Heavy Metal* issues where it appeared."

The results of this restoration are such that even readers already familiar with *Den* will look at the new Dark Horse edition with fresh eyes, due to the meticulous work of all invested in giving it a new life — including Corben's kin.

"ERICHARD CORBENI IS THE MOST INNOVATIVE COMICS CREATOR OF THE 20TH CENTURY."

JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA

"The basic principle I used was to blend scans of the original black-and-white art with scans of the best available printed art in colour, and then fine tune the images," says Villarrubia. "The technique was different on each page. I also corrected minor details such as registration mistakes or other defects. I used Adobe Photoshop and worked at high resolution. I had the enormous luck to be advised by Corben's family, his wife Dona and his daughter Beth, who often coloured her father's work. Nobody in the world knows Corben's intentions better than they do and their generous input has been invaluable."

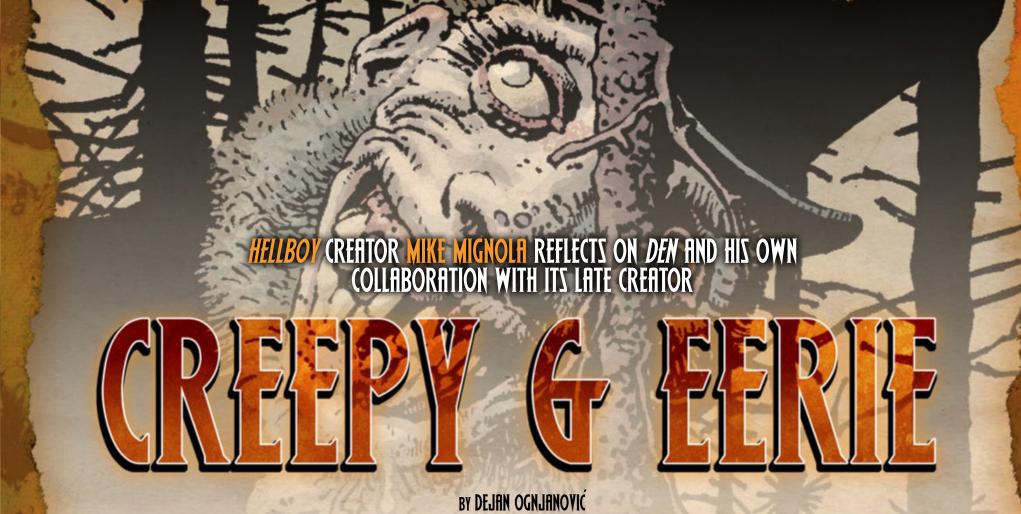
As for *Den*'s place among Corben's works in terms of quality and achievement, Villarrubia has no doubt: "*Den* is a testament to Corben's enormous talent and creativity. It represents the culmination of his artistic endeavours, as seen in

the rich legacy of the short animated film *Never-where* and a vast comic narrative spanning over 600 pages. These stories showcase his ability to craft rich, immersive worlds, populate them with interesting characters, and tell compelling stories that resonate with audiences. In short, *Den* is a masterpiece that showcases Corben's incredible imagination, creativity, and skill."

This new special edition promises to be the ultimate, not only in terms of fully honouring Corben's visionary artistry by rendering it to the highest possible standards, but also in terms of exclusive bonus material. The first *Den* volume contains an introductory essay in which Villarrubia explores the historical, artistic, and cultural context that was the genesis of the Den character and its series, followed by an introduction penned by acclaimed actor and Corben enthusiast Patton Oswalt. There is also the first edition's foreword by sci-fi author Fritz Lieber, an extended essay with several quotes by Corben from his close friend and collaborator Bruce Jones, and a portfolio section with ten additional Den images.

Those horror fans who love their fantasy coloured with vivid violence, nightmarish irrationality, risqué eroticism, gruesome creatures and perversely evil shenanigans can't afford to miss this volume.

Says Villarrubia: "Corben's commitment to experimenting with new visual storytelling methods coupled with his deep knowledge of traditional fine arts, made him a trailblazer in comics, illustration, and animation. Moreover, Corben's artistic achievements testify to the importance of pushing boundaries, taking risks, and exploring new possibilities in art, regardless of one's chosen medium. As such, his work continues to inspire and captivate audiences, cementing his place in the pantheon of great fantasy and horror artists of the 20th and 21st centuries."



hroughout his rich career, best exemplified by his newly restored *Den* series, Richard Corben's memorable artwork provided an extra horror something to several *Hellboy* adventures (*Bride of Hell, Hellboy in Mexico, Being Human, House of the Living Dead*) written by Mike Mignola. For the latter, who also created other genre titles for Dark Hose Comics, including the vampire hunter series *Baltimore*, the occult detective Joe Golem, and the sci-fi oneshot *The Amazing Screw-On Head*, everything about their collaborations was special.

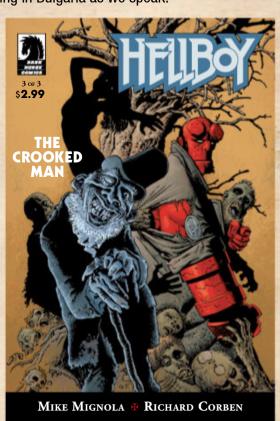
"Just the idea that I would end up working with Richard... that was something I never could have imagined," muses Mignola. "He somehow made *Hellboy* his [own] and still kept everything that was mine. And with Richard, I think we get the only *Hellboy* stories that are actually creepy."

As a sign of his respect and admiration, Mignola provided a foreword for *Murky World*, the first book in the Richard Corben Library of re-mastered works from Dark Horse. As an accomplished artist himself — who mastered a specific type of pulp horror nourished by *Weird Tales*, which is in many ways similar to Corben (just as their love for Lovecraft) — he is among the best to judge the uniqueness of Corben's craft.

"Richard is a strange combination: on one hand, very much a cartoonist with strange little figures and odd little gags, a very odd sense of humour – and on the other hand, a master draftsman, a fantastic renderer. So you have a lot of very odd stuff that is also beautifully drawn. But that's really just scratching the

surface: you feel Richard's commitment to his world, his characters, in everything he does. Even when he is drawing characters he didn't create, he makes everything his own. He has an entirely unique vision. He is one of the very few artists in comics I've never seen imitated. You just can't imitate what he does. There will only ever be one Richard Corben."

One of their most popular collaborations was "The Crooked Man" episode of *Hellboy*, which forms the basis for the new *Hellboy* film, shooting in Bulgaria as we speak.



"'The Crooked Man' I wrote especially for Richard, because I knew there that no other

artist could handle that kind of matter as well," reveals Mignola. "And I was right. He elevated the material in ways I couldn't even imagine, even though I wrote it with him in mind. It remains my favourite *Hellboy* story and that's largely because of what Richard brought to it."

Horror fans are already impatient to see this collaboration of comic giants brought to the big screen, especially since Mignola confesses that it was *the Hellboy* story he'd liked most to see adapted to film.

"For one thing, it's my favourite *Hellboy* story but, also, I think it's the most doable: it's supernatural, but what makes it work, what makes it scary, is that it's grounded in the real world. It doesn't rely on gigantic fantasy set-pieces. And I can safely say this film will be the closest adaptation of a Hellboy story. It is mostly an adaptation of just that one story - with a bit of just one other Hellboy story woven in, to give a bit of Hellboy's backstory. 'The Crooked Man' comic is the core of the thing. There is an extra character and a few extra bits thrown in, but the skeleton of the thing is 'The Crooked Man' and it is intact. Also, judging from what I've seen so far, it has the potential to be the first Hellboy movie that is actually scary. It is the first Hellboy film that is actually a horror film, and I'm very excited about that."

Hellboy aside, Mignola considers the newly restored *Den* series to be the perfect tribute to his late collaborator, one that features the artist's signature character and unique style.

"It is *pure* Corben," he says; "it is a look into an all-Corben world. Moebius has his *Arzak* and Richard has his *Den*."

FILMMAKER ANDRÉ ØVREDAL BRINGS SOME OF THE MOST FRIGHTENING PAGES OF BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA TO LIFE, IN HIS NEW FILM THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE DEMETER



eware the fog and raging storm blowing across the Black Sea this August! This particular storm veils the passage of *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* as it sails from Transylvania into Whitby, England, with fifty boxes of dirt and one very famous undead passenger, hellbent on unleashing an insidious evil on the epicenter of the civilized world. They say dead men tell no tales, but when the titular ship runs abroad the beach of Tate Hill Sands with nobody on board but the corpse of its captain, his cold, dead hands tied to the wheel, a journal hidden in an empty whiskey bottle speaks volumes. Despite the grisly details of the captain's log written under extreme duress, readers of Bram Stoker's iconic novel,

Dracula, still ponder the question 126 years after the tale was written: exactly what went down on that ship? Now, thanks to Universal Pictures, we finally get our answer in a most brutal and terrifying fashion.

Although the chapter "The Captain's Log" from which this film is based is only a few pages long in the original novel, it represents what's perhaps the most pivotal event in the book as Dracula shifts his bloodthirsty gaze from his homeland of Transylvania to the shores of the new free world of England. The filmmakers had to get it right with every single beat of its undead heart, and that enormous pressure was not lost on director André Øvredal (*Troll-hunter*, *The Autopsy of Jane Doe*) who joined the project in 2019.

"I want everything to feel historically accurate on the ship," he explains. "We were very meticulous about recreating a world in 1897 that we really believed in, down to the ship and styling and how we worked in every little detail around those. If a thing was from the wrong year, we couldn't use it."

The director says he and director of photography Roman Osin strategized on how to keep things firmly within the world of Stoker's novel.

"I also always shoot mostly with white lenses because I want the world to show," he adds. "I want us to be in the world we're making and the way the ship works; how it looked and the design of everything to the degree we can stay true to reality. We went to our own choices in certain things, but you will recognize plenty from the book. We were always preoccupied with staying with the text to the degree we can."

Pulling a full feature film out of such a narrow slice of the classic tale was a challenge in and of itself, but even more so considering the technical demands of a historically accurate horror film set at sea: part of the reason *Demeter* languished in production limbo for over two decades.

"We built the whole ship as one huge interior piece in Berlin at Babelsberg, and then we built the exterior, the deck and all the stuff on top in Malta, also with the hull itself," explains Øvredal. "On both stages we would have some controllers to be able to shake the boats and do stuff and when we were in

Malta, we had this water tower splashing water onto the ship in the storm scenes, and huge rain towers. The safety measures around this production was enormous, so it was really precise. We had to be inventive in the face of nature. And then, of course, you have sunrise and sunset [to consider]. We were shooting at night mostly on the deck there because, you know, that's when Dracula is out."

In a novel where the undead Count is only present in about thirty percent of its pages, it's a bold feat, to say the least, that so much horror can be derived by a mere chapter. Fleshing out the tale are Corey Hawkins (*The Walking Dead*) as the skeptical man of medicine, Aisling Franciosi (*The Nightingale*) as a superstitious stowaway, Liam Cunningham (*Game of Thrones*) as the ship's captain and David Dastmalchian (*Dune*) as the Demeter's first mate. Driven to desperation as death permeates their voyage, they're forced to consider that something less than human is aboard their ship.

"I THINK IT IS THE SCARIEST DEPICTION OF DRACULA EVER ON SCREEN; THAT IS MY HONEST OPINION."

- DIRECTOR ANDRÉ ØVREDAL

"I think there is a humanity and there is a wonder and there is something innocent," says Øvredal of the script, which was first penned by screenwriter Bragi F. Schut (*Escape Room, Season of the Witch*) back in 2002. "You know, these are just workers: they could be on an oil rig, they could be on a ship today. These are mostly all male workers and, in the middle, there is this innocence of a boy who is grandson of the Captain. The way he shows us around the ship and the way he makes the story softer in a way, and eventually more tragic altogether because this is not going to go well."

But the spotlight undoubtedly belongs to the fanged one, who appears in his most monstrous form yet with no Van Helsing to get in his way, no means of escape in the middle of the ocean, and no mercy for his prey. This Dracula is no seducer nor a romantic devourer but comes to us instead as a savage beast out for blood.

"I think it is the scariest depiction of Dracula ever on screen; that is my honest opinion," says Øvredal. "It's a horror movie with Dracula at its centre, something that hasn't really been done much before. It's (usually) an epic drama with pieces of horror. This is scary. It's set out in the ocean. It's like *Alien* on a ship in 1897. You've got beautiful vistas and intriguing characters in a unique environment. It's a blend of horror and



Gothic Gore: André Øvredal's take on the classic book depicts Count Dracula at his most monstrous.

history and emotional drama and existential horror that I think has never been made before. I personally think it's a very unique, original movie the audience will embrace."

With a cinematic legacy that includes portrayals by Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee, Gary Oldman (and yes, even Nicolas Cage), Øvredal is equally confident that his lead ghoul, Javier Botet, is poised to join their ranks in horror history. Botet, whom you've seen (but perhaps not recognized) in his monstrous roles as the hobo in 2017's It or the Crooked Man in The Conjuring 2, is clearly no stranger to spending days on set under heaps of SFX makeup, and Øvredal took full advantage of the actor's ability to deliver a very physical performance of a vampire who's more monster than man.

"Sometimes you don't even need to tell him stuff; he would just keep giving performances and variations and moments," says Øvredal, who worked with the Spanish actor in 2019's *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*. "Even if the camera keeps rolling, he gets at it again and does more

stuff that you weren't expecting, and he gives you alternatives for something weird that the character has to do on screen. I remember he was so happy to be able to portray Dracula on screen because he's one of his favourite characters, and he was ecstatic about it."

When it comes to making a vital contribution to the legacy of its undead roots, *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* has set its anchors firmly in the banks of the bloodline it's meant to represent and expand upon. As for coming away with answers to a mystery 126 years in the making, Øvredal is confident that the film is well worth the wait

"It's always amazing to be part of the legacy of something that is so much greater than yourself, that is already so established in culture and in cultural history," he says. "*Dracula* is always a presence; every couple years you see a new movie based on *Dracula*. Obviously, there are variations on it through the history of the cinema, but [this is] one of the first ones focused on making Dracula scary."



ENJOY AN EXCERPT FROM DC's





SUMMER'S CHILL

TALK TO ME

Starring Sophie Wilde, Joe Bird and Alexandra Jensen Directed by Danny and Michael Philippou Written by Bill Hinzman, Daley Pearson and Danny Philippou VVS Films

Back in my day, a slumber party might include some Ouija board antics or perhaps a *Craft*-inspired round of "light as a feather, stiff as a board." In Talk to Me, the dazzling feature debut from Australian brothers Danny and Michael Philippou, a new generation of teens do more than dabble in the occult when they come into possession of a mummified hand that has the power to not only reach into the other side, but invite the dead into our reality.

Teen girl Mia (Sophie Wilde) is having a rough go of it, having recently lost her mother under uncertain circumstances, driving distance between her and her father (Marcus Johnson). She finds some relief from the gloom when her friends gather to play with a strange acquisition — an embalmed hand, rumoured to have

TALK TO ME

belonged to a powerful medium, that allows its users to command the dead to show themselves ("Talk to me") and even temporarily take over their bodies. But these possessions are visibly real, and videos of their party sessions turn into viral social media sensations. It's all fun and games until young Riley (Joe Bird) smashes himself to a pulp under the hand's influence,

sending him into a coma. But when Mia thinks she's invoked the spirit of her mom, the opportunity to find out what really happened to her is too much to resist, even as her obsession with the hand sends her into a downward spiral that threatens the lives of everyone she holds dear.

It's a simple plot device, but don't be deceived by that: in addition to its shocking violence, *Talk to Me* tackles grief, coming-of-age, and basic human ethics with a deft and sympathetic, um, hand. Equal

parts chilling, heart-wrenching and refreshingly modern, *Talk to Me* is a standout debut from exciting new filmmakers from down under, one that's poised to haunt slumber parties for the social media age for decades to come. Don't sleep on it.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

MILLENNIAL PROMETHEUS

BIRTH/REBIRTH

Starring Breeda Wool, Judy Reyes and Marin Ireland Directed by Laura Moss Written by Laura Moss and Brendan J. O'Brien Shudder

The squelchy, gassy, alien realities of lifegiving and the agonies of motherhood have been fruitful thematic material for the horror genre since Mary Shelley transmuted the pain of losing

her newborn into Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus, and first-time feature director Laura Moss returns to that fertile ground for Birth/Rebirth: a chilling tale of an ultramodern Prometheus that really gets into the guts of 21st century womanhood.



Rose (Marin Ireland)

is a brilliant though unfeeling pathologist who spends her days ordering Cobb salads without any of the good stuff ("No bacon, no chicken, no eggs.") and methodically jerking off dudes in public lavatories in order to harvest their raw genetic material for her clandestine experiments. After successfully reanimating the corpse of a

six-year-old girl, it isn't long before the child's grief-stricken mother, an earthy, overworked nurse named Celie (Judy Reyes), finds out what Rose has done. Celie is surprisingly undisturbed by the discovery, and the two establish a perverse sort of domesticity as they care for and chart the development of her reborn daughter. But after a setback renders the resources needing to keep her alive suddenly scarce, Celie and Rose are forced to resort to extreme, even deadly measures.

The film's attitude toward bodies is impersonal and invasive, with the digital moans of Ariel Marx's score and Chananun Chotrungroj's camera elevating routine gynecological procedures to capital-B Body Horror. Reves and Ireland each give a powerhouse performance, with the former's profound humanness and depth-offeeling cut humorously by the latter's delicious sociopathy and warped sense of amorality. They're helped along by Moss and Brendan J. O'Brien's sneakily ambitious script, which animates this classic Frankenstein narrative with thematic sinews pertaining to bodily autonomy, medical misogyny, and procreative ethics on top of its expected but well-handled examination of grief and interrupted maternity. Ultimately, the only thing more disturbing than the implications of Birth/Rebirth's mad science is how slyly its winking transgressions give way to a heartstopping, sick sincerity.

ROCCO T. THOMPSON

DON'T OVERLOOK

BAD THINGS

Starring Gayle Rankin, Hari Nef and Molly Ringwald Written and directed by Stewart Thorndike Shudder

It's exciting to see Stewart Thorndike, the director who gave us a queer take on *Rosemary's Baby* with her breakout horror, *Lyle*, back with a new film. Her second feature, *Bad Things*, follows four friends spending a weekend in a shuttered hotel, but instead of having the run of the amenities, they'll have to run for their lives.

Ruthie (Gayle Rankin) has inherited a hotel



from her recently deceased grandmother. She's planned a weekend getaway with her partner Cal (Hari Nef, Assassination Nation), Cal's ex Maddie (Rad Pereira), and Maddie's newest hook-up Fran (Annabelle Dexter-Jones), before the property goes up for sale. On their first night, Ruthie

proves to be an unfaithful partner, and the next morning, Fran thinks she sees ghosts of former guests. Amidst the mounting mayhem, Ruthie's estranged mom ditches a planned meeting with



her daughter and potential buyers. It's just as well since Cal wants Ruthie to keep the hotel, but it's not a place of happy memories for Ruthie and her family. This decision weighs on her, and her only moments of calm come from videos of a TED talk-styled hotel boss lady (Molly Ringwald). Soon, mean-girl tensions run high, while Fran becomes unhinged and convinced they should all leave the hotel. But her warning goes unheeded as danger lurks in the deserted halls.

There doesn't seem to be a single reliable narrator in Bad Things but this isn't necessarily, ahem, a bad thing. By the time you realize there is a fractured reality going on, you'll also see obvious echoes of *The Shining*; but instead of Jack Torrance's supernatural nightmare, Ruthie and her friends are grounded in the muck of the psychological damage people inflict on each other. The outcome is weird and creepy with a juicy indie feel that just might be Thorndike's horror signature - a queer horror pastiche, if you will - and who doesn't love seeing Ringwald doing genre again? Along with the fantastic ensemble, the best thing in Bad Things is Hari Nef's measured portrayal of Cal, who can only be a lovely tribute to horror's most famous Wendys - Carlos and Torrance.

CAROLYN MAURICETTE

WORTH THE PAIN

MEGALOMANIAC

Starring Eline Schumacher, Wim Willaert and Benjamin Ramon Written and directed by Karim Ouelhaj Dark Star pictures

"Inspired by true events" is usually a yawn-inducing turn-off, but here's an exception: a truly excellent film which takes the unsolved case of a Belgian serial killer from the 1990s as a springboard for a what-if tale about his entirely fictional offspring and their bloody legacy. Evil Goth broth-

er, a sadistic killer, lives with his shy, quiet (half?) sister in an old, baroque house where women he abducts are tortured and killed. Things get complicated when his sister's prolonged harassment at work culminates in a brutal group rape — leading to awakening of her own sadistic traits, but also a pregnancy. When the rapists and enablers are invited to a supper in the psycho house, the menu promises ketchup aplenty!

The joys of this film are manifold: the Belgian-Gothic looks, captured in DP François Schmitt's cold, desaturated imagery and stylized

ruin-porn are laced with a thick atmosphere of decay. The acting of all involved, but especially Eline Schumacher as Martha, whose arch ranges from a tortured soul to a torturer herself. Assured direction by Karim Ouelhaj, holding all nuances and complexities un-



der control, is equally adept at drama, suspense, pitch-black humour and splatter.

Megalomaniac is built upon dichotomies: psycho/sister; house/outside world; gothic/realism; torture/martyrdom; tortured/torturer; brutality/poetry, but the borders between these are shady. "Normalcy" is a fiction, after all, just like "good guys," or a happy ending. With an unforgiving attitude toward both his characters and his audience, Ouelhaj is a worthy addition to the pantheon of New French/Belgian extremism, ready to join the ranks of Noé, Laugier and du Welz. While it could've used a bit more clarity in narration and relationships (especially between bro and sis) and a more original/less predictable ending, this is still one of the year's best horrors, well worth the pain.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS A SNOW JOB IN SUMMER

CHRISTMAS WITH THE VAMPIRES



RED SNOW

4Digital Media

Seeing as climate change is setting the world on fire, I thought I'd cool things off this summer by offering up some reviews set in the deep winter! And what better place to start than Lake Tahoe, where a struggling vampire romance novelist comes across a wounded bat in her backyard one cold, December night, and nurses it back to health. That bat is actually a vampire, natch, on the run from a vampire hunter on the prowl to end his afterlife for good! With a setup like that, you'd guess that

Red Snow is a dark comedy romp, and if you guessed it's a good one, you're right twice. Props go to this movie for sticking to practical effects over CGI right to the end. Plus, what can I say – I have a soft spot for vampires portrayed as misunderstood creatures, even when they're draining the blood of innocents! **BODY COUNT:** 7

BEST DEATH: Severed head hacky sack!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK WAS HERE



NO EXIT

20th Century Studios

This studio release from yesteryear is based on a best-selling novel I never read, so if you came here for a page-to-screen analysis, you're shit outta luck. *No Exit* centres on a young woman named Darby who breaks out of rehab in the hopes of seeing her mother one last time before she passes away. On the way to the hospital, she's caught up in a wicked snowstorm and road closures that force Darby to seek refuge in a nearby visitor's center with four other strangers while the blizzard rages

outside. But just as she is about to resign herself to her fate, Darby discovers that one of her compatriots has a terrible secret tied up in the back of their van. This bit of isolationist horror delivers a tight, cleverly directed script, with strong performances and more twists and turns than a switchback road!

BODY COUNT: 5

BEST DEATH: Nail-gun skull shot!

A MAN OF WEALTH AND TASTE

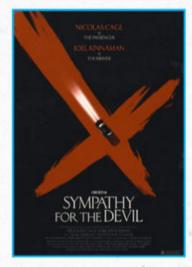
SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

Starring Nicolas Cage and Joel Kinnaman Directed by Yuval Adler Written by Luke Paradise RLJE Films

Earlier this year, *Renfield* reminded us how cool it can be to see Nicolas Cage in a major production that gives him the chance to apply his true chops to a role. With *Sympathy for the Devil*, we're back to recent business as usual: the actor in a lower-budget indie flick, in which in which he brings more to his part than it does to him.

Joel Kinnaman plays family man David Chamberlain, whose arrival at a hospital where his wife is going into labour is interrupted by Cage's gun-toting stranger getting into his back seat. Without so much as a "Please allow me to introduce myself," The Passenger (as he's credited) forces David to drive him toward an

initially unspecified destination, with an uncertain fate at the end of the trip. Along the way, the Passenger does some conspicuously violent things that a man on his mission probably wouldn't, though they do allow Cage to get his over-the-top villain on. With his red-and-black jacket and hair dyed to match, he cuts a properly Mephistophelean figure



given to sudden outbursts of scenery-chewing and one vintage disco sing-and-dance-along, which are certainly entertaining to watch.

Director Yuval Adler and writer Luke Paradise want to puzzle us with the nature of the Passenger's game, but the longer the film goes on and the more hints are dropped, the easier it is to figure out the backstory and the resolution ahead of time. If the destination is underwhelming, the trip there has its moments, with Cage's mania nicely complemented by Kinnaman's desperation as the Everyman protagonist, and the occasional stylish or effectively vicious touch. There are humourous bits as well, even though some of them appear to result from Cage attempting to amuse himself rather than the viewer.

MICHAEL GINGOLD





MAINE COURSE

KING ON SCREEN

Starring Frank Darabont, Mick Garris and Tom Holland Directed by Daphne Baiwir Dark Star Pictures

This affectionate chin-wag with filmmakers who have adapted one or more Stephen King tales is rather like a one-day reunion of extended family: it's lovely to see everyone and the discussions are smart and lively, but often cursory, and leave you wishing for a longer visit with a smaller group. Priorities are problematic too; these people clearly know what's what, but no one wants

to admit that while a handful of King movies are great and some are fair-to-middling, many are just freakin' dreadful.

Some big names are conspicuously absent due to mortality or other commitments, but the gang's very nearly all here and there's no

denying they're an impressive group. Fittingly, Frank Darabont (*The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Green Mile*, *The Mist*) and his pal Mick Garris (who struck gold with *The Stand* in 1994 and remains King's most frequent adaptor) get the bulk of screen time. Both are affable and engaging

speakers with great anecdotes and trenchant insights, but it's also heartening to see them alternated with Zak Hidlitch (1922), Vincenzo Natali (*In the Tall Grass*) and other relative youngsters.

Without an onscreen moderator, some awkward shifts and shocking omissions are inevitable. Garris' record-breaking *The Stand* gets well-deserved props but its broader legacy, as a game-changer not only for horror on TV but for the miniseries format itself, doesn't rate a mention. Also conspicuously absent from the discussion is Mark Pavia's 1997 sleeper hit *The Night Flier*, which enjoys a huge (and still growing) cult following and is widely regarded as one of the best King films to date. Garris aptly calls *Carrie* (1976) "the one that started it all" but the two latter-day versions, while admittedly hit-andmiss affairs, aren't discussed.

Then there's the matter of an affectionate but self-indulgent fantasy intro, in which director Daphne Baiwir travels into the Maine of King's stories, encountering characters and locations both iconic and, er, less iconic. Cute and intermittently clever, the sequence grinds on for seven minutes before rather arbitrarily fizzling out so the interviews can get rolling.

Taking good with bad, *King on Screen* is thoughtful and fun. Its somewhat scattershot approach will be off-putting for the afficionado and perhaps misleading for the neophyte, but to quote Kierkegaard, "You know you wanna!"

JOHN W. BOWEN

GATORBAIT

THE FLOOD

Starring Casper Van Dien, Nicky Whelan and Louis Mandylor Directed by Brandon Slagle Written by Chad Law and Josh Ridgway Saban Films

With literally hundreds of shark-attack movies swimming onto the scene in the past decade, killer-alligator/crocodile movies have been scrambling to catch up. Actually, we can only wish for a speedier delivery while watching *The Flood*, which is essentially *Crawl* meets *Assault on Precinct 13* while being significantly slower on the uptake.

As Louisiana is battered by Hurricane Gustavo (a reference to real-life African killer croc Gustave, the subject of 2007's *Primeval*, perhaps?), a busload of hardened-criminal prisoners and their guards seek shelter at the Lutree Sheriff's Department stationhouse. No sooner have the quintet of generic badasses been shown to their cells than four heavily armed compatriots of cop killer Russell Cody (Casper Van Dien) show up to bust him out. And at the same time, the build-

ing – CGI on the outside, cheap sets filmed in Thailand on the inside – is invaded by equally digital, very hungry alligators. There's nothing like the threat of becoming dinner for toothy oversized reptiles to unite folks on both sides of the law, though the excitement promised by



deadly gators + automatic weapons never pays all. Instead, we get dumb stuff like one allegedly battle-seasoned tough guy failing to close a door between himself and the rapidly approaching creatures.

The boilerplate characters and dialogue are matched by the slack pacing and listless action staging, which isn't helped by the repetitive, deadening score and the endless cutaways to the storm outside. If you manage to make it to the end credits, you may find yourself question-







ON THE SLAB: A LITTLE BIT OF SUNSHINE

GRAVE SIGHT

7:27 mins/YouTube via Angus Swantee's channel

Within the context of a horror movie, it seems especially sacrilegious to rob a grave in broad daylight. But in *Grave Sight*, Tanya (Holly Stevens) and Preston (Craig Gunn) are making an afternoon of it, complete with folding chairs, sunglasses, and the kind of bickering you'd expect from a longtime couple on an outing. But they're not just there for



R&R, as Tanya is hellbent on finding the rare jewelry that rests with the witch they're digging up. When they eventually hit paydirt, they also inadvertently conjure a hulking demon (Dale Bellefontaine) that wants to reclaim the ring along with their souls. Directors Walter Forsyth and Angus Swantee have taken the demonic summoning trope and turned it on its head, replacing moody atmosphere and heavy gore with farcical splatstick and silly gags involving Preston's eye. Sometimes there's nothing wrong with keeping it light!

SHIFTER

4:34 min/YouTube via the Lowlife Film channel

Surely the things that go bump in the night are harmless in the middle of the day, right? That's just the kind of misguided notion that directors Joel Eklund and Robin Stjernberg seek to set straight in this short film, soaked in equal parts sun and dread. When Mollie (Mollie Nylund) gets a knock on the door while hanging around the house, she sees what appears to be her boyfriend Joel (Joel Eklund) on the porch facing away from her; a fact that makes her uneasy when she gets a phone call from Joel, claiming to be nowhere near the house. Eklund and Stjernberg create tension by shattering the illusion of security we get not only from daylight, but from the familiarity of our own homes as they distort these elements into something malevolent and decidedly unsafe. You may think twice about answering the door after watching this one.

HOMESICK

11:37 min/YouTube via the Alter channel

For a young boy (David Samuel Goergen) left alone amid a post-apocalyptic landscape, daylight does little by way of comfort. Director Samuel Goodwin puts us into his small shoes as he clings to a daily routine while he's trapped in his house, lest he subject himself to the unknown terrors that lurk outside. Goergen effectively conveys the way tasks like cleaning his room and getting television time are the only thing keeping him going while he waits for his missing mom to hopefully make it back to the house one day. Through all of this, Goodwin establishes a foreboding mood with bright lighting that looks sickly and worn out. Everything comes together to depict a sense of weariness in the situation while also instilling a resiliency in a kid that far surpasses his years.

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

ing how several production outfits and seventeen executive producers could be responsible for a movie that resembles nothing more than the latest Asylum quickie.

KEN MICHAELS

RADU'S RETURN

SUBSPECIES V: BLOOD RISE

Starring Anders Hove, Denice Duff and Kevin Spirtas Written and directed by Ted Nicolaou Full Moon Features

It's been over two decades since the fourth installment, and now director and writer Ted Nicolaou conjures clan Vladislas for *Subspecies V: Blood Rise.* Known for his various collaborations with Charles Band's Empire Pictures throughout the '80s, Nicolaou struck a sinister chord within the hearts of horror fans with his twisted and fresh take on the vampire. The *Subspecies* films would become a flagship franchise for Full Moon Features, spearheading the success of the company alongside the *Puppet Master* series. With an atmosphere dripping in Old World tension and locations straight out of a Gothic horror novel, Nicolaou's creatures of the night carved out their own slice of cult movie history, but can the immortal bloodsuckers knock the dust off after 25 years? The short answer is – absolutely.

Blood Rise transports us back in time, long before the events of the first four films, to further explore

the haunted history of Radu Vladislas (Anders Hove) and his hunt for the Bloodstone. Stolen from his witch-mother Circe (Yulia Graut) at birth, Radu appears to be cured of his family's blood curse by a band of crusaders. For years, he would follow in the brotherhood's footsteps, searching for and eventu-



ally discovering the castle of his supposed father, Prince Vladislas (Kevin Spirtas). Upon a chance encounter with the vampire Helena (Denice Duff) while fleeing the fortress, Radu slips into a world of mystery and darkness.

The Subspecies franchise has always excelled due to the creativity and world-building of Nicolaou, combined with the staggering stage presence of Hove, and Blood Rise is no exception. Fans will be pleased with the numerous call-backs and Easter eggs, such as the Sword of Laertes, an artifact referenced in *Subspecies* 4: Bloodstorm. Nicolaou is constantly adding wrinkles and layers to the world - making the magic more complex by revealing more of Radu's hidden powers via a Highlander-like training sequence with Circe. The music of Sean McBride goes a long way in upholding the Gothic atmosphere of the film. Likewise, while not filmed in Romania itself, choosing to shoot on location in Serbia maintains much of the original film's mojo. Subspecies V: Blood Rise is the story of the fall of a noble man and his descent into a monster; join him!

JUSTIN YOUNG



itting like a blast of cold Alpine air perfumed with the funk of mountain goats and gooey raclette, or a bracing chop to the gut from a mystical halberd (that most Helvetian of polearms), co-directors Johannes Hartmann and Sandro Klopfstein's *Mad Heidi* is the Swissest Swissploitation joint you'll find on either side of The Rhine. Not that there's much competition, mind you.

"The depressing thing about Switzerland is that there's no genre films [here]," says Hartmann. "[Everyone] does these boring social dramas, so we thought we should change that."

Burnt out on working as hired guns for commercials and music videos, the collaborators decided that their first true artistic endeavour should combine their love of exploitation movies with every cliché ever coined about their homeland, and thus, *Mad Heidi* was born. Inspired by Johanna Spyri's iconic 1880s child heroine of the Alps, the film tells the tale of a grown-up Heidi (Alice Lucy) on a quest to avenge her lover, Goat Peter (Kel Matsena), who is murdered by the henchmen of President Meili ('90s heartthrob Casper Van Dien) — a cheese obsessed strongman who rules over the country with a bloodthirsty intolerance for the lactose intolerant.

Drawing on some of Hartmann and Klopfstein's favourite grindhouse classics (especially Corman-style women-in-prison movies) and even a few contemporary riffs on the same ("*Turbo Kid* is a great [comparison], there's a lot of love and passion [and a] serious core

to the story," says Hartmann) *Mad Heidi* is a love letter to both dedicated Swiss genre fans and those eager to see the country's oft-neutral, yet ever-mighty spirit depicted in a fresh way onscreen.

"There's a lot of people who say, 'I would usually not watch a movie like that, but I'm really happy that there's something like this coming from Swit-

zerland," explains Hartmann. "I think that was the biggest part; without them we couldn't have done it," seconds Klopfstein.

Bringing their dream project from milk to wheel was no sure thing in a country where most films are made using cultural funds from the state, meaning that niche efforts like *Mad Heidi* have to go it alone. But a teaser post on Facebook quickly amassed a fervent fanbase, as did a merch campaign that became a powerful proof of concept. From there, the writer/directors to begin script development, and eventually lead to their market-

ing masterstroke: not just crowdfunding, but *crowdin-*

"For every Swiss franc you invested, you got one 'Heidi Bond' added to your account, and you could then use your [bonds] to get special bonus rewards," the directors explain. "People [could] actually buy shares and then participate in the revenues of the movie [via] a blockchain-based system where all the revenues are distributed automatically."

With a successful worldwide festival run in the rearview, an upcoming Fathom Events engagement in the U.S., and an announced sequel in the works, the dynamic Swiss duo are pleased with the impact their little grindhouse pastiche that could has made, and are eager to continue finding new ways to bring their projects to full ripeness. But whether Swissploitation Films LLC is eventually known as the house *Mad Heidi* built or the boys continue to innovate new ways to bankroll their

next wild endeavour, the duo hopes that they'll continue to impact the destiny of their country's film industry, one genre fan at a time.

"It's a typical Swiss mindset that people say, 'You can't do it here, so you shouldn't even try it'," says Hartmann. "But," he concludes, "of course you can. You just have to do it!"





SWAMP THING ARISES UNCUT, AT LAST, ON 4K UHD

In April 2002, a Dallas mother named Mary Dorflinger rented a copy of MGM's DVD release of Wes Craven's *Swamp Thing* from her local Blockbuster Video, figuring the PG-rated adventure/monster movie would be suitable for her nine-year-old son and his friend. Once the boys viewed it, however, she was shocked to discover that it contained nudity (including a topless bathing scene with star Adrienne Barbeau) not present in the U.S. theatrical or VHS editions of the film. Dorflinger complained to Blockbuster, and the chain soon pulled the disc from their shelves, followed by MGM removing it from distribution altogether.

"I was working at MGM when that happened, if memory serves me correctly," says Eric D. Wilkinson, now director of acquisitions at MVD Entertainment Group. "As I understand it, the wrong master had been pulled off the shelf for replication, and the unrated international version was what ended up on that disc."

As word of the Blockbuster incident and the withdrawal of the DVD spread across the Internet, that version of *Swamp Thing* became an instant collector's item, with some fans quickly buying up their local stores' stock of the disc with the intent of reselling them later.

"With any title where you get a recall, that's when people start scrambling, like, 'It's a rare

variant, I've gotta get my hands on that,'" Wilkinson says. "With that particular film, it was even more of a rare variant, given the content."

MGM reissued the theatrical version of *Swamp Thing* on DVD in 2005, and Shout! Factory did the same when it gave the movie its Blu-ray de-

but in 2013. Now, the unrated international edition is becoming available at last via MVD on 4K UHD as the debut title in its LaserVision Collection, and on DVD under the Rewind Collection banner, both streeting July 25. It's the culmination of eighteen months of effort on Wilkinson's part, as well as an example of his more intensive recent focus on cult and genre fare.

"We had been licensing movies from MGM," Wilkinson says,

"and when we launched the Rewind Collection, I knew not every one we were going to pick up would be a cult title. So not long after, I started the MVD Marquee Collection, and that first round of MGM acquisitions included films for both. I was sort of feeling my way around to see which releases resonated with the buying public, so by the time I got to the second round, it was more heavily weighed on films for the Rewind Collection. When we went back for a second batch of MGM titles, *Swamp Thing* was available, and I

knew that MVD was anxious to start issuing classic films on 4K disc. Shout! Factory's license on that movie had expired, and it was on the top of my list to put out."

Critical to that goal was the desire to finally give the international cut an approved release. As a collector himself, Wilkinson lurked the same forums as his tapehead peers and kept tabs on what they were after.

"A decade ago, when Shout! Factory an-

nounced they were putting *Swamp Thing* out on Blu-ray, the first questions posted there were, 'Will it include the uncut version?'" he notes. "So



my intention from the beginning was to exhaust every possibility to get permission to do the international edition, so if we couldn't – and if you follow me or MVD or the Rewind Collection on social media, you will see that I'm very open with the collectors – I wanted to be able to publicly explain everything I tried to do, everything humanly possible."

That effort involved negotiations with multiple parties, including the horror icon whose bare breasts drew the ire of Ms. Dorflinger in the first place.

"MGM told me that I would need to get permission from Adrienne Barbeau and her team before we moved forward. That's part of the reason why it took eighteen months to get this done, because it required the work of somebody who was patient enough to continue the discussions and get to a place where everyone was happy. That included MGM, the Adrienne Barbeau team, MVD, everybody. We picked up fifteen or so films in that group, and I thought, 'Okay, I'm just going to move Swamp Thing down to the bottom of the list, and work on that on the side while putting together these other discs, like At Close Range and Disturbing Behavior and others that didn't require the kind of attention Swamp Thing did.' I put the easier ones out first, basically! But I kept at it, and kept the conversation going, and Adrienne was open and lovely and gracious, and her people were negotiable and flexible."

Thankfully, getting ahold of the materials for that alternate version was a much less complicated process, and the new discs boast a boatload of extras in addition to the 16-bit 4K restorations of both the international and theatrical cuts. Fans can expect audio commentaries by Craven and makeup/creature effects artist William Munns, interviews with Barbeau, costar Reggie Batts and others, behind-the-scenes photos, promotional materials and more. None of these are new, but a few have been upgraded, as Wilkinson details.

"My approach for the Rewind special features is, it all depends on what's available, the quality of what's available, and the budget. With *Swamp Thing*, between the cost of the acquisition, the transfer, the 4K authoring, the packaging and everything, that's where I wanted to spend the



back to his love of RCA SelectaVision discs of the early '80s.

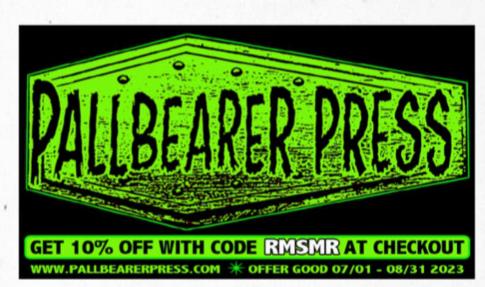
"I bought a VHS copy of *Bull Durham*, which I didn't even need, just because it had a sticker on it that said, 'Recorded in EP mode. Minor tracking adjustments may be desired.' I thought, 'I've gotta have that!' I want my 'stickers' to be authentic; I don't just do Google searches and say, 'Okay, I'll slip this on there.' They're hand-picked, and I'm crazy about the detail. Then my brother David at Drawing Board Entertainment does the graphic design for the packaging, and I'm back and forth with him in regards to the positioning, the size of the sticker, how much sun fade it should have or if there's going to be paper damage to it.

"The amount of detail that goes into the packaging for these titles is probably taken for granted, which is fine," he concludes. "People don't have to notice; I just want them to be able to hold it in their hands and feel something. The reason we love physical media is its tangibility, and the nostalgia for that, and I want to create products that make people feel good that way. That makes me happy."

money. There were the two commentaries along with a number of great bonus features produced by Michael Felsher for Shout! Factory, which we licensed, and others that were once exclusive to the UK Blu-ray from 88 Films, which we also licensed. So what we did was get all the existing supplements together for the first time, and I didn't feel the need to re-interview people, because I felt it would be redundant.

"Even better," he continues, "we were in the final QC stages when I found what I thought was a little audio glitch in one of the features Michael had worked on. I reached out to him, and it turned out there was no glitch, but after he took a look at it, he remastered some of the bonus features for this release, to make them look better and slightly different from what you might remember from the Shout! Blu-ray."

One last area he paid special attention to was the packaging, inspired by his aforementioned fervor for vintage video media. The Blu-ray slipcover, for example, is adorned with replicas of the kinds of stickers that used to be placed on VHS boxes and clamshells back in the video-store days; a detail that brought Wilkinson





CAME FRO 30 / = 1 BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Severance Package by John W. Bowen

his issue, we celebrate - well, alright, more like "scrape off the ceiling" - the largely forgotten 1982 splatter-haunt opus Superstition (a.k.a. The Witch), but you're gonna have to indulge me for a brief historical detour first. My basement, my rules, fuck you.

January 1998: the #1 song is "Truly Madly Deeply" by Savage Garden; Rodrigo Gudiño is running Rue Morgue magazine out of his Toronto apartment as a one-man operation; and, while toiling away at his day job (something to do with custom kitchen countertops), the bass player in my band severs three of his fingers on a table saw. His coworkers have the wherewithal to pack the displaced digits in ice and surgeons are able to reattach two of them. Thanks to the skills of Matt's doctors and physiotherapists and the fact that he's the most

ornery motherfucker alive, he's playing bass again in less than two months and the band is back to gigging in less than six.

A heartwarming story, triumph over adversity and all that, but why this seemingly superfluous setup? Well, aside from highlighting the unspeakable injustice of sensitive artists like myself (and Matt) having to work (harrumph!) day jobs, there's a wonderful scene in Superstition involving a circular saw "accident" (or is it?) that's even gnarlier than my friend's phalangeal misfortune, albeit a damn sight less believable. I'd forgotten about it until I sat down to re-watch

this trifling footnote of a fright flick and damned if it didn't suddenly get me thinking back on the workplace mishap in question.

But on to the film itself, for better or worse. Even taking Superstition's general lack of big names or



cult figures on either side of the lens into account, it's hard to fully comprehend the reasons why this one fell through the cracks. It's far from great in its totality but there are some startlingly audacious

moments and, given the number of horror filmmakers who've built entire careers on delivering great moments in otherwise mediocre films (various names - predominantly Italian - leap to mind), you'd think Superstition might have amassed at least a little more of a following by now. Because what it lacks in memorable performances and halfway coherent writing, it (mostly) makes up for in startlingly gruesome kill scenes.

Its setup has a New England house haunted by the vengeful spirit of a witch, executed in the 17th century, who now lurks in the adjacent lake and can only come out to

fuck shit up after dark. (A reason is given for this - albeit not a particularly good one, but hey, they made the effort, okay?) The property is still owned by the local church and a couple of parish officials are now getting it ready for the church's new min-

ister, an alcoholic trainwreck with a troubled family. There's also a weird old woman who lives on the property with her even weirder son, the ghost of a little girl murdered by the witch in question, a rumpled detective trying to make sense of it all, and a supply of hapless locals who get offed in spectacularly improbable and gory fashion. A child of its time, Superstition is basically a ghost story that follows the slasher blueprint (albeit - goddammit! - devoid of nudity) with a smattering of *Omen*-type "accidents" tossed in for poops and titters.

For all of the film's half-assed attempts at elaborate backstory and (retch!) family drama, the takeaway for most of Superstition's paltry fanbase seems to boil down to two must-see kill scenes: the aforementioned circular saw mishap and a gag in the first act involving a severed head in a microwave which, while less-than-flawlessly executed, won me over with its gleeful brazenness. (Besides, the victim in question could pass for a teenaged Donald Trump, which is the stuff of multiple rewinds, no?)

Superstition has had several home vid reissues down the years, the latest being Shout Factory!'s 2019 Blu-ray, a good-looking transfer replete with several interview docs and some trailers. (Disclosure: I'm unsure whether these were exclusive or had been included on previous incarnations.) Now get the hell out of my basement, but please count your digits before exiting.







Mutilation Theatre is a definitive DVD collection of White Gardenia's films. This DVD includes never before seen collaborations with Jack Mulvanerty, Gore Filth, Bones, Christian Michelsen, Ariel Pink, & more; as well as a 12 page booklet.

18+ Contains Graphic / Violent Content | Order online @ goredrome.com | filmfreeway.com/danielvalient

"There's nothing quite like White Gardenia...Daniel and co. specialize in the art of pain and beauty. An artform in itself." - Severed Cinema

FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

Tempting Fates

"HARKENING BACK TO MAD SCIENTIST CINEMA OF THE 1930s AND '40s, THE BLACK PIT OF DR. M IS A TIMELESS AND UNAMBIGUOUS MORALITY TALE THAT RANKS AMONG MEXICO'S MOST FASCINATING EARLY HORROR FILMS."

hether you call it karma, comeuppance or — in modern parlance — "fuck around and find out," there's something satisfying about the belief that, in the end, everyone gets exactly what they deserve. And although these poetic endings seem to happen more often in fiction than in real life, you can't deny that it's been an exciting year so far for witnessing the well-deserved downfalls of several of our most obnoxious and pompous public figures. Horror buffs have long been fans of this particular trope, which has been a staple

of mad scientist films including the 1959 Mexican masterpiece *The Black Pit of Dr. M* (a.k.a. *Misterios de Ultratumba*). Released by Indicator as part of a new *Mexico Macabre* Blu-ray box, *The Black Pit of Dr. M* is a must-see classic of cosmic retribution presented alongside other south-of-the-border terrors such as *The Witch's Mirror* (1962), *The Brainiac* (1962) and *The Curse of the Crying Woman* (1963).

The film revolves around Dr. Masali (Rafael Bertrand), a physician at a crumbling mental asylum who becomes convinced there's a way to experience life beyond death. He makes a pact with his colleague Dr. Aldama (Antonio Raxel) which stipulates that the first to pass away will try to discover how to beat the reaper and communicate this secret back to the other. When Dr. Aldama unexpectedly dies soon after, he gets word to Dr. Masali promising that, in just a few months, he will finally learn how to cheat death. Later, when one of the asylum orderlies is disfigured in an accident and kills a nurse, Dr. Masali is wrongfully blamed for the murder and sentenced to hang. Believing this wrongful punishment is his chance to achieve immortality, Dr. Masali resigns himself to his fate, only to discover that the hangman's noose would been a preferable outcome after all — as he awakens in the body of the murderous orderly, he realizes his future holds only inescapable madness and terror.

Harkening back to mad scientist cinema of the 1930s and '40s, *The Black Pit of Dr. M* is a timeless and unambiguous morality tale that ranks



among Mexico's most fascinating early horror films. Like Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Doctor Cyclops before him, Dr. Masali pays a particularly steep price for his maniacal obsessions that drive him to tamper in God's domain. But what's most notable about the film is its unmistakable air of resigned fatalism — from early on, it's obvious that only tragedy will come from Dr. Masali's arrogant attempts to achieve immortality, and yet he persists with his experiments, ignoring warnings from Dr. Aldama's ghost and accepting a

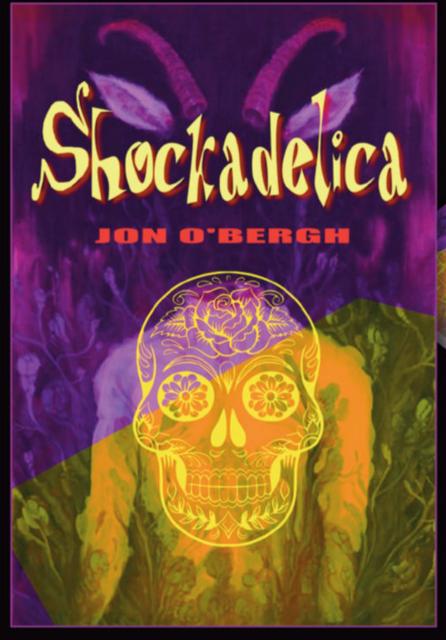
death sentence to test his theories. The tragic sense

of foreboding is further reflected in the film's uncanny imagery - claustrophobic close-ups, asylum hallways full of grasping arms, and shadowy gallows that seem to further torment Dr. Masali as he ascends the stairs towards the noose, unsure of his final fate.

We're a long way from the days of wild-haired mad scientists toiling away in equipment-stuffed labs, but the same sense of inevitable collapse seems to hang over the heads of many of our most prominent figures today. Whether taunting opponents, spreading lies or ducking accountability, toxic tyrants like a certain former president have tried to achieve their own online immortality in recent years, only to discover that you can't outrun karma forever. From high-profile arrests and bankruptcies to revelations of business ineptitude, it's been gratifying to be reminded in recent months that it's not only in horror films that pride goes before the fall.

Karmic retribution might be a convenient plot device for paperback novels and scary movies, but it's probably a bit naïve to put too much stock in mysterious spiritual forces that help balance the morality of the universe. After all, most of these bad faith actors and self-styled provocateurs have likely caused far more damage over the years than any personal punishment could ever make up for. But if there is any justice in the world, then it's only fitting that these figures should achieve the historical notoriety they believe they are destined for — only not for their successes. Now that would be a twist of fate that even Dr. Masali could appreciate.





Two horror podcasters, a haunted apartment, supernatural beings and a witch—what could possibly go wrong?



Reviewers Pick Best of 2022

Aurealis Magazine

"I just could not set it down" Erica Robyn Reads

"A book that must be on your to-read list"

Out Front Magazine

"Full of mystery, comedy, third wall demolition, and of course HORROR"

Horror DNA

"A five-star read"

Curiosity Bought the Book

MOTHER NATURE Russell Goldman, Karl Stevens and Jamie Lee Curtis Titan Comics

Various *Image*

Josh Ruben and Briana Tippetts Invader Comics

BLOODBORNE: THE LADY OF THE LANTERNS

Cullen Bunn and Piotr Kowalski Titan Comics

THE GREAT BRITISH

John Allison and Max Sarin Dark Horse Comics **GRAMMATON PUNCH**

Miles Gunter and Briane Andan Comixology Originals

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

o-written by filmmaker Russell Goldman and Jamie Lee Curtis (who will be directing and starring in the upcoming movie version from Comet Pictures/Blumhouse), Mother Nature is an eco-horror graphic novel based on the duo's screenplay.

In it, the town of Catch Creek, New Mexico, owes its survival to the Cobalt Corporation and its mysterious, experimental oil extraction projects. When young Nova Terrell witnesses her father's death in a company accident, she spends what remains of her youth waging a war of sabotage and vandalism against the corporation. But Nova soon realizes that her personal tragedy pales in comparison to the long-dormant and vengeful forces about to be unleashed by Cobalt's 'Mother Nature' project.

Originally conceived when she was only nineteen, Curtis long wanted to explore the strained relationship between humanity and nature. Setting the story in New Mexico also provided the opportunity for the co-writers to explore the unique connection between the land and Indigenous peoples (including Nova's mother), with a climax that draws heavily on their beliefs and

folklore.

"I was terrified about the idea of representing an Indigenous spirit incorrectly, or from a perspective I couldn't understand, but our Indigenous advisors Aaluk Edwardson and Jeremiah Watchman encouraged us to embrace the challenge of weaving in a spirit from the Navajo Creation Story with the research and care and time it would demand," reveals Goldman. "There are so many evocative characters that medicine men have passed down for generations but haven't been depicted in much media before. Indigenous audiences love horror movies as much as anybody, and in any horror movie the monster is the coolest character. So fully weaving in Navajo myth by depicting the naayéé ended up being the best form of representation we could go for in making a horror story."

It was no less a challenge for artist Karl Stevens, whose job (and original idea) it was to adapt the screenplay as a graphic novel while the film was still in preproduction. As a result, he had a certain amount of freedom in depicting the supernatural elements and consequent carnage.

"My work is influenced by film technique, so it wasn't much of a jump to adapt the screenplay," says Stevens. "It also gave me more leeway to design my own page layouts and come up with the character designs. I usually write my own stories and think of the visual storytelling as part of the writing process, and not just illustrations of the text. The gore was a challenge since I haven't really done a lot of it before in my other books. Jamie was helpful in that regard by sending me videos and visual references to look at."

The story offers up an incredibly strong cast of female characters, who must dodge nature's deadly manifestations, including wrathful spirits, lethal hailstones, and killer tumbleweeds. Along with Nova and her mother, there's teen Riley and her mom, Nancy, and Cobalt's head, Cyn-



Mother Nature: A screenplay-turned-graphic novel that weaves eco-horror with Navajo folklore.

thia Butterfield (played by Curtis in the film). But Mother Nature didn't start out that way.

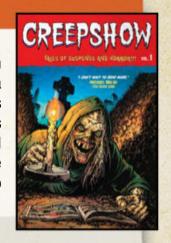
"We were trying to pair the wild horror scenes [Curtis had] dreamed up with the clearest emotional through-line," says Goldman. "It struck me that our title Mother Nature worked beyond personifying the Earth and could speak to what I believe the movie was asking to be about, which is these two mothers navigating what kind of world they're trying to leave for their daughters. From there, it felt natural to make all the heroes and villains of this story women. Then it's not a story about women in the face of men - it's a testament to all the strong women I grew up around and the strong women who inspire me today, Jamie being high up among them."

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO

......

QUICK CUTS

Considering the strong influence of vintage horror comics on the *Creepshow* franchise, it's surprising that it's taken more than forty years to put out an actual comic tie-in (original movie adaptation notwithstanding). The ten tales presented here succeed as a whole by giving each story its own style and voice. There are straightforward, ghoulish revenge tales (some naughty trick-or-treaters get their just desserts for taking too much candy); black comedy (a mother inadvertently hires a kid-chomping demon for her child's birthday party); creature features (something is munching on backwood campers); cautionary tales (an aging gay man makes a deal with the Devil via his smartphone); and even a touch of existentialism (a young girl's garden tree creeps into her destructive home life – literally). It helps that each tale boasts a different creative team, and with the likes of Paul Dini, Steve Orlando, and Francesco Francavilla contributing, you know you're in for plenty of tricks (and treats).



After a serious accident at the metal factory where she works, senior Darla Demrod's life spirals out of control. Not only must she deal with an emotionally distant husband, an estranged daughter, and the death of her beloved dog,

DARLA

RUBEN / TIPPETTS

AT HYALLS CHARLES ALLEGED IN

fracking-spoiled groundwater and an increasing amount of medication add to her medical woes. With her sanity slipping away, Darla finds support from an ultra right-wing politician and a strange dark creature who whispers promises of friendship - among other things. Darla is a modern American

fable, touching on the country's contemporary horrors including systemic pollution, Trumpism, gun control, prescription addiction, paranoia, and mental illness. That *Darla* manages to deal with

all this without sounding preachy is impressive; that its lead character is deeply sympathetic despite her faults and horrific acts is all the more so.

Bloodborne: The Lady of the Lanterns continues the video game's foray into comics, with acclaimed writer Cullen Bunn chronicling this installment. As the lethal epidemic which turns people into mindless zombies and snarling were-creatures spreads across Yharnum, a group of Hunters fight the diseased to protect the innocent. Meanwhile, a mysterious siren walks the streets, calling those who hear her strange song to certain doom. Having read several of Bunn's own works, it's obvious he's playing in someone else's sandbox here: though he treats his toys well, giving the players enough motivation to elevate them from simple fodder, the complex characters and subplots he's known for take a backseat to monster attacks and

bloody battles. This should be enough to satisfy fans of the games, but anyone else will most likely shrug and move on.

Someone is **killing** off the contestants of "The UK Bakery Tent," one of Britain's top cooking reality shows, in *The Great British Bump-Off.*One of the players, Shauna Wickles, fancies her-

self an amateur sleuth in addition to an accomplished baker, and takes it upon herself to catch the perpetrator. Can she manage to avoid elimination from the show as well as becoming the killer's next victim? A mash-up of Agatha Christie and reality TV, *Bump Off* has a decent premise, a quirky cast of characters and a fun and appealing art style. Yet there seems to be a vital ingredient missing: the comedy leans into cutesy territory when

it's crying out to be darker and more satirical. The result is a fluffy, sweet concoction where a more dense and savoury treat would better hit the spot.

Most young boys have to worry about school bullies: Van Nguyen has to worry about being beaten up by ghosts. Being born during a solar eclipse has given the guy the ability to see ghosts and all the mischief they're up to, such as draining the vitality out of unsuspecting

victims. Turns out they don't like being spied

upon, so they take it out on Van by smacking him around, especially one particularly nasty ghost lady with a single giant eye. And so Van had a pretty crummy childhood - until the day he learned he could smack back. Grammaton Punch is a refreshing ghost story, drawing on influences such as manga, anime, and the odd vid-



eo game. It's appropriately punchy, funny, and creepy all at once, while showing just the right amount of heart. Never mind ghost busters, it's time to call in the ghost smackers!







THE CIRCLE BOOKS

NAKED THEATER & UNCENSORED HORROR: A MEMOIR BY STUART GORDON

Stuart Gordon FAB Press

Stuart Gordon could not film all his dream projects (like the White House-set *Re-Animator*), but this autobiography, published posthumously, arrives as his last masterpiece. Yes, from beyond the grave, but filled with the life juices (passion, honesty, love, irony, black humour, love of the macabre) that animated his rich filmography.

It's a no-holds-barred, tell-it-like-it-is, often politically incorrect account of a creative life, which ranged from alternative theatre (his Organic Theater Company's numerous provocative performances included the nudity-filled Peter Pan production that almost put him in jail)

through struggles in the low-budget arena, all the way to the top (if working for Disney, with Honey, I Shrunk the Kids, which he co-wrote, can be called that). Some of the book's unforgettable moments include: hilarious details about shooting in Italy for Kings of the Bs, Albert and Charles Band; clashes with

Abel Ferrara (re: *Body Snatchers*, which Gordon was supposed to make) and David Mamet (luckily, smoothed over); encounters with legends (Ray Bradbury, Roald Dahl, and Peter O'Toole, who almost starred in *The Pit and the Pendulum*); revealing details about working with the volatile: Dennis Hopper (*Space Truckers*), Christopher Lambert (*Fortress*), Anthony Perkins (*Daughter of Darkness*), and absolutely insane anecdotes about Oliver Reed's novel use of wine bottles.

You'll get to see what made Gordon one of the best adapters of E.A. Poe and H.P. Lovecraft; you'll have a privileged insight into the making of classics with his collaborators, Dennis Paoli, Brian Yuzna, and Jeffrey Combs (who wrote a warm tribute for the book's end); and you'll be touched by his lifelong love for his wife, actress Carolyn Purdy-Gordon, and their daughters. It's a heavy volume (350 pages), but never dull, lavished with rare, exclusive photos — and it's probably the most fun you'll have reading a book this year.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

THE MAKING OF THE MOVIE LEPRECHAUN — I NEED ME GOLD!

B. Harrison Smith BearManor Media

Filmmaker and author B. Harrison Smith's latest book *I Need Me Gold!* tells the tale of the making of 1993's *Leprechaun*. It goes through every beat of production, from director Mark Jones' cinematic origin story, to designing the monster costumes for actor Warwick Davis, to all the political inner workings of film distribution in the new home video landscape.

As stated in both the foreword by actor Ken Olandt and the author's own introduction, *I Need Me Gold!* is much more than just an oral history of one movie. The whole book is constructed as a primer on what it takes to make a film with big scares on a microscopic budget, with a healthy dash of autobiographical reflection from Smith on his own career in film as a grown-up monster kid.

The prose in *I Need Me Gold!* is casual and conversational. This makes for an easy, breezy read through the book's 300 pages; feeling like a conversation with a chatty friend. While the insider view into the making of *Leprechaun* gives the impression that the reader is being let in on a secret, none of the production content is presented as a handbook or blueprint for Hollywood's next generation. Instead, it's a nostalgic look back at a dinosaur era of indie horror filmmaking.

This stroll down memory lane with Smith and friends is sprinkled with on-set photos and publicity materials that were used at the time for promotion. Strangely, there are also an abundance of screenshots of tweets and other social media posts throughout the book with little context or value added to them. Knowing that an Instagram post got sixteen likes is all well and good, but adds nothing to the meat of the story.

What is good is the clear affection Smith and his interview subjects have for the now 30-year-old film. It's just as hard to kill the Laprochaun as it is to kill

just as hard to kill the Leprechaun as it is to kill the love for it from its fans.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

NIGHT TERROR

John Kenn Mortensen Fantagraphics

Even if the name John Kenn Mortensen means

nothing to you, chances are you've seen some of his art. One of his ink-and-paper illustrations, featuring an impossibly wide-mouthed skeletal hag about to bite down on an oblivious man's

head, made regular rounds on social media a few years back, drawing commentary about how it was the perfect visual representation of anxiety.

The full-page images that comprise Night Terror share not only an artistic style with that infa-



mous illustration, but also a mood. Mortensen sums it up himself in his Artist's Statement, which opens the book and reads in part: "When I go to sleep, I bring to my dreams leftovers from the waking world. When I leave the landscapes of the night, I try to bring back as many monsters as I can. This is a book of those monsters."

Then *Night Terror* serves up its first image: a nightmare creature feasting on a young boy's tears – presented without text or commentary.

This isn't the case for all of the art within; some pictures have a sentence or a snippet of dialogue beneath them. There's a debate to be had as to whether the text is necessary, as Mortensen's illustrations are nothing if not evocative, with their mysterious settings and unsettling characters.

Monsters invade every page – from beasts and wraiths to witches, clowns, and strange marionettes to other sinister beings – but children are also frequent visitors to these parts, be they watching the creatures,

sailing in small boats with them, or riding on their backs. Sometimes the kids are threatened, other times they are curious or completely oblivious. Each drawing invites deeper inspection.



At under 100 pages, *Night Terror* is but a morsel of Mortensen's body of work, but it's a tasty morsel indeed. Eerie, unsettling, and guaranteed to whet your appetite for more.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

WHALEFALL

Daniel Kraus MTV Books



Whalefall feels like an expansive book, even though most of it takes place inside the body of a whale, over the span of just two hours, and many of its chapters are super short. It's all due to the subject matter which, while heavy, never bogs things down.

The book opens with Jay Gardiner trying to find parking for his dive; a trickier thing than usual as there's some sort of commotion going on at the beach. However, he doesn't let this deter him any more than he does the danger of diving here alone – something he promised he'd never do. This stretch of water has a sinister reputation. But it's also where his terminally ill, local legend father killed himself, and in hopes of repairing familial rifts and restoring his rep, he's here to find his old man's bones.

What he finds instead is a beast so large it likely doesn't even know it swallowed him – unless there's something to that voice he keeps hearing, his father's voice.

Whalefall is a teen-vs-nature story, but anyone who is familiar with author Daniel Kraus' previous young adult novels (*Scowler*, *Rotters*) will know that's far from the only struggle bound to occur here. And indeed, Jay is not just fighting for his life against the sperm whale that accidentally swallowed him; he battles his grief, his anger, and what could well be the ghost of his father (a difficult man with whom he had a contentious relationship for years) – oh, and also a giant squid.

There's undeniable horror to having one's bones be crushed by the muscular forces of a massive mammal's digestive system or one's skin dissolved by its acids, but there's a subtler horror at work here as well: one born of grief, guilt, resentment, unresolved childhood trauma, and suddenly facing all of that while confronting one's own mortality. The book's greatest strength is in how Kraus intertwines and interweaves the two.

Dive in.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

WHERE THE NIGHTMARE ENDS

Robin Wood
PS Publishing

A group of young friends and relatives winds up stranded with their boat on a deserted island in the middle of a lake. There's an abandoned house with a terrible stench coming from the cellar and cans of meat that look as if a large animal tried, unsuccessfully, to open them. Oh, and there's a desiccated female corpse in the rocking chair, too, but it's still the best shelter on the damned rock, so they decide to spend the night inside. Then the nightmare begins...

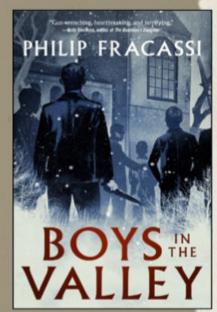


BOYS IN THE VALLEY

Philip Fracassi
Tor Nightfire

Opening with a shotgun blast of tragedy, the stage is quickly set as we're introduced to Peter, our young protagonist, and his subsequent arrival at the St. Vincent's Orphanage for Boys. For most who end up at the orphanage, which is controlled

by the heavy hand of Father Poole, the only hope is to age out and be sent to work in some nearby factory for the rest of their lives. But even that shred of hope is dashed when an injured man is brought to their doorstep in search of medical assistance after being shot during the ritual sacrifice of a young girl. Scream-



ing in strange tongues and possessing strength that defies his injured state, the prisoner leaves an insidiously evil gift that spreads throughout the orphanage like tentacles born of hate and consumption.

Elevating this book beyond just another high-octane romp through hell are the elegant, heartfelt details that Philip Fracassi gives each character, no matter their role. For example, Peter's relationship with Father Andrew exemplifies the sacred beauty of goodness which can be found in the darkest of places. Unfortunately, even the staggering cost to protect what they most believe in may not be enough to save them.

So often we see religion used as a catalyst for fanatical intentions or as a defense mechanism against evil. With *Boys in the Valley*, nothing is so absolute. While this brooding tale of old school terror may not alter your current relationship with religion, it will inspire faith in Fracassi's undeniable ability to draw you into a bleak world that is worth exploring – and returning to – even after the blood on the altar has dried.

RICK HIPSON



ORROR HAS LONG HAD A VIBRANT SMALL PRESS SCENE, ONE EVEN COVID COULDN'T SHUT DOWN, AS EVIDENCED by the launch of Tenebrous Press, a noteworthy new publisher of weird fiction.

Matt Blairstone was living in the U.S. Pacific Northwest and working in indie comics when the pandemic broke out and his industry went into a state of suspended animation. Then came the wildfires.

"I hadn't realized how much I take for granted just being able to open a window and let in fresh air, until I couldn't," he says. "The whole debacle got my creative juices firing, though; I wanted to hear tales of climate horror from all over the world. I opened up a call for fiction and comics dealing with an Earth that is no longer indifferent to a negligent humanity but is instead actively hostile."

That anthology, *Green Inferno*, was published in 2021 following a successful Kickstarter campaign. But Blairstone got something even more important from the project.

"I met Alex [Woodroe] in the slush pile," he explains.

"The two of us bonded in frighteningly quick fashion; I can't recall what specific hooks we put in each other, beyond each of us being hungry to create something new, something global; without borders, without restraint, and intended to elevate the voices of people desperate for a chance to scream. ... She was already an accomplished editor, whereas I was trial-by-firing it through the process of *Green Inferno*; but she agreed to join me and spearhead our next project: a collection of modernized Gothic horror called *In Somnio*. At this point, not only were we not killing each other, we were thriving and feeding off each other's enthusiasm. And from that point, it was on."

What makes their partnership particularly unusual is that Woodroe lives on the other side of the ocean, in Romania, and as of the time of this interview, they have never met in person. Not that that's put a damper on their work. In 2023, Tenebrous is releasing eight books, including two from Canadians (Laura Keating's *Agony's Lodestone* and Ashley Deng's *Dehiscent*) — all falling into a subgenre that Blairstone and Woodroe call New Weird Horror.

"When we were discussing what our voice was," says Woodroe, "we realized that despite having very different backgrounds, we were both drawn to the same things: the dark and unusual and experimental and exciting. ... [China] Miéville's New Weird was very close to what we needed, but not perfectly right. We needed to express that same spirit of living on the edge of genres, of living on the edge of expectations, but with a horror core. We needed what New Weird would have been had Shirley Jackson written it. So, we came up with New Weird Horror on the spot."

This aesthetic is on full display in *Dehiscent* (out this summer), about a young girl growing up in a "living" house – full of vegetation and impossible gifts – overlooking the East China Sea. The dystopian story concerns her inevitable, horrific discovery of what the family must do to keep the house

providing. For a cinematic example, Blairstone points to the trippy, single-location film *Glorious* (2022), co-written by Joshua Hull, who will be making his prose debut with Tenebrous next year.

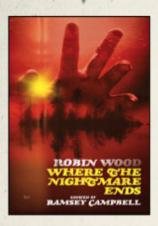
The press often graces its releases with untraditional cover art. Blairstone says this comes down to "an utter disinterest in cover art that traditional publishing deems acceptable," not that it doesn't cause problems.

He explains: "With Valkyrie Loughcrewe's *Crom Cruach* — a book that's already a challenge to traditional fiction in both subject and format — artist Jonathan La-Mantia composed a wraparound black-and-white *horror vacui* cover with the title scrawled vertically up the margin. That's a big no-no in an industry where staid legibility and tradition are the order of the day."

It'll be interesting to see which rules Blairstone and Woodroe break next. In the meantime, there's the up-

coming magazine *Thank You for Joining the Algorithm*, a tabletop RPG planned for 2024, and, of course, more books to look forward to.

"We're both stubborn, grind-it-out people," notes Blairstone, "and despite our healthy skepticism of everything going on in the world, we're cultivating a movement of like-minded individuals who agree that there is in fact a place for ethical publishing that refuses to compromise its values; that can both be commercially viable and function with integrity. The Tenebrous Cult is real. And it's growing."



The basic outline resembles a novelization of an early 1980s monster-slasher flick (say, *Humongous*, 1982), but what elevates this horror novel, and makes it far more interesting, is that it was written by the influential Canadian film critic Robin Wood (see *RM#187*), probably around 1980, but never published until now, many years after his death. This short novel (with an afterword by Ramsey Campbell) offers a unique opportunity for readers to see a critic put his theory to practice, and those familiar with Wood's

indispensable writings will get an extra kick out of recognizing the formula "Normality Vs. Monster," monster as the product of an oppressive, religious family, and also his sexual politics (it's not really a spoiler that his "final girl" is a liberated woman, or that his "final boy" is a repressed gay man).

The plot does take awhile to get to the meat, what with all the (melo) drama to set up the numerous characters and their relations, but once the horror starts, it doesn't pull any punches when it needs to get messy, with stakes being pretty high given that there's also a small infant among the ever-decreasing number of survivors. In the end, the writing gets the basic job done, with some cinematic touches and memorable suspense set pieces; it would've made a fun B-flick laced with actual A-ideas.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

WILD SPACES

S.L. Coney Tordotcom

Horror can be synonymous with heartbreak, especially in the hands of S.L. Coney and their debut novella *Wild Spaces*. Billed as Robert McCammon's *Boy's Life* meets H.P. Lovecraft, readers will experience coming of age in a beautifully horrific way.

"The dog shows up at the mint-green house on the edge of the woods a month before the monster arrives, his coat shiny as a new copper penny." Simple yet lush, Coney's opening sets the style for the remainder of the book and provides readers the opportunity to settle in. The boy lives a gentle life with mother and father. The arrival of Teach, the



only named character in the book, seems to signal the best summer of his eleven years. Lyrical prose builds a story of learning, love, and family, at least until grandfather shows up. Then the boy must navigate new waters, and the emerging horror is as insidious as it is fascinating, for grandfather brings secrets and the boy begins to change; nothing and no one is safe.

Coney's talent for writing is evident as this rich story develops in 128 short pages, set in a microcosm of the South Carolina shore. Readers not only watch but feel right along with the boy as the life he knows is twisted and tangled until he can no longer trust anyone except Teach, not even himself. This book is certainly a *Bildungsroman* as it showcases the boy growing up and, in the realm of cosmic horror, becoming something new and terrifying.

Horror, when it demands readers relinquish their hearts, can provide both comfort and pain, which can be difficult to describe to the uninitiated. Add in the coming-of-age factor and even the most hardened fans will have a difficult time not falling in love with this novella. An excellent debut from Coney that requires us to remember that "...we all have doors inside leading to cracked places and wild spaces."

TRACY ROBINSON

LIBRARY DAMNED

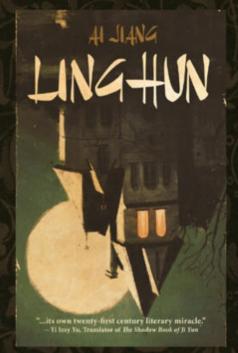
HOME IS WHERE THE GHOSTS ARE

n horror stories, people tend to be frightened of hauntings, oftentimes tormented by them. Ai Jiang's *Linghun* (out now from Dark Matter Ink, with two bonus short stories in the back) flips

that trope on its head, daring to envision a wholly different situation: a world in which the grieving run towards haunted houses for a chance to spend more time with their lost loved ones.

In the story, the town of HOME, which contains the haunted dwellings, comprises some of the most sought-after real estate out there — so lucrative that people literally camp out on neighbourhood lawns for years, just to get an opportunity to buy in.

If you've ever lost someone, the idea of procuring such a residence could be tempting.



When letting go is so impossibly hard, so utterly unimaginable, why not hold onto a ghost? Why not live with one?

As enticing as this cohabitation prospect may be, *Linghun* is a work of horror, and in her debut novella Jiang explores the ramifications of clinging onto a ghost as if it were a life preserver. We witness much of the fallout through the eyes of Wenqi, the daughter of a couple who move to HOME hoping to reconnect with their first-born son, who died when he was six. While her parents can presumably see her brother's spirit clearly, to Wenqi he's always blurry, which only adds to her uneasiness about the relationship her mother insists she have with him.

But it's not just living with a ghost and the people on the lawns that make things unsettling; HOME is stuck in the past, with its schools teaching a curriculum that's decades out of date. The dead are clearly the most important thing here. So, it's not surprising that Wenqi and Liam, whose family are "lingerers" who live on the lawns, decide to flee to the city.

There are myriad horrors on display in *Linghun*, from abject violence (the monstrous auction that takes place when one of the neighbourhood houses is put up for sale) to the more subtle and penetrating, several of which arise from holding on so tightly to someone who's gone that the needs of the ones who are still here are forgotten.

Given the youth of Wenqi and Liam, *Linghun* also has coming-of-age elements; the pair's desire to escape this backwards, frustrating existence is not unlike that of any number of real kids from backwater towns who yearn for more than their communities can give them.

Whatever future readers take away from it, *Linghun* is a haunting meditation on grief and loss from a talented emerging author, who reminds us that letting go is often the best thing we can do – not just for ourselves, but for the dead.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

Follow Monica on Twitter @monicaskuebler

FRIGHT GALLERY CURATED BY PAIGE REYNOLDS



THIS MONTH: THE MULTI-COLOURED MONSTERS OF MARK SPEARS

A RUDWORD COLLECTIBLE



Rondo Hatton Award winner Mark Spears (Artist of the Year – 2020) creates striking, bright, and menacing monster portraits. In the spirit of Basil Gogos, Spears uses phantasmagorical colour palettes to create vibrant, surreal creatures that any monster kid would want to hang in their crypt. The artist's obvious love for ghouls and creatures of the night bleeds through his entire catalogue, from each wrinkle to every fang.

NAME

Mark Spears

HOMETOWN HAUNT

Huntsville, Alabama.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

"I mostly work in digital now but still pencil and ink from time to time. I usually work in Photoshop with my custom brushes on a Cintiq 32-inch tablet."

DEEDS

"The *Spawn* covers I did for Image comics, winning the Rondo Hatton Award for Artist of the Year, and my Mark Spears Monsters trading cards – they have been a big hit."

MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"I draw from all types of sources. I just think of what would look cool and try to put down on the page what is in my head. I love horror movies and anything with creatures and monsters in them."

LAST WORDS

"If you hit a point where all your paths are blocked, make your own way. When no one would give me any work, that's what I did. That is how the Monster trading cards came to be."

RESTING PLACE

Find Spears on Instagram and Twitter: @markspearsart

FOLLOW PAIGE ON INSTAGRAM @PAIGEREYNOLDSART









S SOMEONE FULLY IN THE THROES OF HER CRONE ERA, I

can't help but look back at the follies of my youth with some wonder. I'm not referring to, say, impromptu street racing or that time I decided to experiment with a razor and shave my eyebrows off. No, I mean something far more daring and reckless, which is my calling *The Descent 2* "a pleasant surprise" that I "really enjoyed" when I reviewed it years ago.

Neil Marshall's *The Descent* is one of those lightning-in-a-bottle horror movies, where disparate pieces come together to make a perfect whole that hits the right spot at just the right time. It's also a complete package unto itself; one that's tied up with a neat bow, regardless of whether or not Sarah makes it out of the cave at the end (depending on which version you've seen). *The Descent* simply didn't need a sequel at all, but its success practically demanded it get one anyway.

But hey, wholly unnecessary sequels can be great! (If you don't believe me, just ask *Psycho II.*) As a shameless fan of the original film, I was excited to spend more time in its subterranean world, and thus I was inclined to overlook the sequel's assuredly glaring faults and adore whatever it threw my way. Don't get me wrong, I think it's great that I was into it at the time. I like liking movies! But watching it now, more than a decade on... man, my residual positive feelings for its predecessor must have been mighty strong that day. Maybe there was a carbon monoxide leak in my apartment that went undetected?

Here's the point in these proceedings where I say something like, "There's one detail in *The Descent 2* that is firmly lodged in my brain like the business end of an ice axe." But how to choose only one when there are so many absurd details in the film that have rendered holes in my brain like so much Swiss cheese?

My favourite, perhaps, is the absolutely shocking (?) reveal that Juno, the woman who spearheaded the ill-fated caving expedition and was left alone to face a cadre of crawlers at the end of *The Descent*, is appar-

ently a Senator's niece, prompting a search and rescue worthy of a media frenzy. Are the other five women in her group – who are only regular people's nieces,

if they be nieces at all – unworthy of a proper a search and rescue? It's a hilariously low stakes, inconsequential character note and I can't help laughing when the "authorities" realize what a VIP she is and gasp in distress.

Or is my favourite detail the one that's a strange holdover from *The Descent*; the fact that Lady Crawlers have long hair? We never know for certain exactly what the creatures stalking the caves are, but it's proposed that they are humans who have evolved to adapt to life underground. That's a whole Neil DeGrasse Tyson-sized can of science worms waiting to be opened, but hey, it's a good enough explanation for me. But if this is true — or heck, even if it's not and the creatures are some species unrelated to humans — why must the Lady Crawlers have hair at all? The only explanation I am willing to accept is that it's not their own hair, but a wig they snatched off a hapless spelunker once upon a time and is now worn solely for the fun of it. The only alternative, which I'm loath to accept, is that even when you are an otherwise-hairless, solid grey creature-thing with sharp teeth and pointy ears who drools slime and lives completely in the dark, one must still conform to unrealistic beauty standards for women. That detail is just too depressing to contemplate!

Now that I think about it, I'm willing to bet it actually was a wig. Surely it was tossed down the crawler hole by the local old geezer; you know, the guy in the movie whose granddaddy discovered *The Descent*'s remote, unmapped cave system years ago. The guy who apparently feeds the crawlers because maybe he thinks his dear old granddaddy is still down there, and in dire need of frizzy, disheveled locks? I don't know. I can't explain away *The Descent 2*'s nonsense any more than I can explain away my own. But kudos to past me for giving it a fair shake back then. Maybe my giant underground pool of blood (note: in *The Descent 2*, it's upgraded to a shit pit which is perhaps more appropriate for this underground outhouse of a film) is half-full after all.







AND



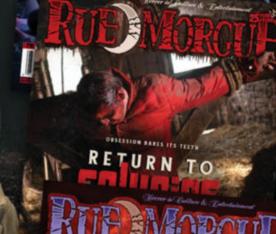


20 LUCKY SUBSCRIBERS will win a Halloween

Action Figure courtesy of Fright Rags.

WANT YOU TO

PLAY AND SLAY!





WINNERS WILL BE CHOSEN AT RANDOM AND NOTIFIED BY PHONE OR EMAIL.



COLLECTIBLE BACK ISSUES

PURCHASE INSTANTLY! RUE MORGUE ACCEPTS CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS AT RUE-MORGUE.COM. CLICK ON "SHOPPE.















JUDITH MYERS





IS YOUR SUBSCRIPTION
FOR A FRIEND? CHECK THE
BOX BELOW AND A GIFT
NOTE WILL BE INCLUDED
WITH THE FIRST ISSUE!

50%
OFF NEWSSTAND

CANADA 6 Issues

12 Issues

OVERSEAS

6 Issues

12 Issues

USA 6 Issues

RUE MORGUE **DIGITAI**

SUBSCRIBE TO THE WORLD'S #1 HORROR MAGAZINE NOW VISIT RUE-MORGUE.COM OR YOUR DEVICE'S APP STORE

CA \$71.95

US \$65.95

CA \$133.95





•		•		1	•
	-	-	~	_	

NAME:

ADDRESS

US \$94.95 US \$134.95

CITY:

PROVINCE/STATE: POSTAL CODE/ZIP:

12 ISSUE SUBSCRIPTION!

PHONE:

EMAIL:

BEGIN MY SUBSCRIPTION WITH ISSUE #

Please send cheque or INTERNATIONAL money order payable to: MARRS MEDIA INC. 17 Willingdon Blvd Etobicoke ON, M8X 2H1 CANADA. Please allow three to six weeks for delivery.

VISIT RUE-MORGUE.COM FOR MORE SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS

DOA DEAD ON

REVIEWS BY JESSICA BUCK, ALEX DELLER, AARON VON LUPTON.



THE ALIEN FACTOR

SOUNDTRACK

Kenneth Walker

MYSTIC VAULT

In the annals of genre cinema, Don Dohler's *The Alien Factor* is far from a classic, but it does come with a droning, experimental synth-based soundtrack that is perhaps the most memorable aspect of the sci-fi/horror comedy. Composer Kenneth Walker's score functions as an exercise by first year film students, but in a good way. He assembled this thing from a mail-order synth kit one note at a time, and his love for the craft shows. Listening to the music severed from the visuals gives the score room to breathe and pulse in unusual timbres and unexpected directions. Miami-based newcomer Mystic Vault has done the grubby little '70s film proud with this slick release, complete with eye-popping cover art and green swirl vinyl. If burbling antique electronica is your bag, let The Alien Factor transport you to another time



THE BATTERY

SOUNDTRACK

Ryan Winford SCARE FLAIR

Ryan Winford's music for 2012's *The* Battery doesn't sound like a traditional horror score, with its emphasis on country-tinged acoustic guitar, resulting in a highly melodic album that's easy on the ears, albeit in a mournful mood. Tracks like "Rain On A Tin Roof" couple guitar with reverberant

piano to create lonely vestibules of sound. While some of the horror beats are underscored as you'd expect for a film about an apocalypse of the undead (often appearing as dissonant washes of sound), the album's overall tone is more contemplative and lulling. It's especially interesting on cues where these two approaches combine, fusing the bucolic folk style with uneasy textures percolating beneath the mix. The spare instrumentation is given ample space to breathe in a way that functions just as well as an isolated listen as it does coupled with the film, and that's saying something. **\$**\$**\$**\$1/2 **JS**



SOUNDTRACK THE FLYPAPER SPECTACULAR SOUNDTRACK

Wolfmen of Mars

HAUNTED SCREEN RECORDS

Known for upbeat psychedelic horror grooves and soundtrack work for movies like Satanic Panic, Wolfmen of Mars has now created its own latenight, animated Halloween special - The Flypaper Spectacular - and its accompanying score. The soundtrack release contains only two tracks but stretches out to almost 40 minutes, with the short film score followed by "The Spectral Sounds of Space," a half-hour ambient audio trip. Emulating the sci-fi tones of classic B movies, the tracks lean on ghostly theremin warbles, sparkly synth, slide guitar, drum machines, and howling winds to create an otherworldly adventure. While it's usually best to see the film before checking out the soundtrack, it's not entirely necessary in this case. More of an audio journey than a musical album, this soundscape inspires lush mental imagery – like memories of being a kid at the planetarium. Put it on, lay down, and space out with the wolfmen. 🕺 💆 JB



ZOANOIDS

Effigy

HEY PIZZA! RECORDS/ENDLESS DETENTION

For lovers of fast, pulpy, horror punk, the 2020 self-titled debut from Zoanoids was a much needed salve at the end of a rough year; maddeningly catchy, with diverse and literate themes including kaiju, H.P. Lovecraft, and a Zoroastrian chaos demon (why not?). The dissolution of many horror pop darlings of yesteryear had us fearing we might never again see this kind of scholarly commitment to B-movies and bubblegum melodies, but the Zoanoids new album, Effigy, expands the instrumental palette with vintage synths and more complex guitar, while sticking to similar themes. There are tunes about disintegrator rays, falling in love with the midnight movie bombshell, nods to Poe, Cenobites, and Evil Dead 2. Zoanoids may not be reinventing the wheel, but the band is at least carving its own rut in the genre. 🕺 💆 💆 DR



GHOST

Phantomime

LOMA VISTA

Ghost is back with another EP of covers, which usually means an opportunity for Tobias Forge to flex his creative muscles and rework '80s pop into more rocking affairs, having already turned Abba and the Eurythmics' tunes into his own brand of stadium anthems. Sure enough, Phantomime's strongest track is Tina Turner's "We Don't Need Another Hero" from Mad Max III: Beyond Thunderdome. Surprisingly, the cover of old school Iron Maiden rocker "Phantom of the Opera" is the EP's weakest point - despite being seemingly made for the Ghost treatment, the song simply doesn't work. Television's "See No Evil" totally does, however: tapping into Ghost's penchant for morality themes, the song explores the Asian tale of the three monkeys who see, speak, and hear no evil, while the guitar arpeggios are blown up to appropriate stadium

ZOMBIE: COMPOSER'S CUT

Fabio Frizzi CADABRA RECORDS

Not long after releasing his "composer's cut" for The Beyond, the pandemic hit Italy like an army of flesh-eating ghouls. And so, the legendary Lucio Fulci collaborator Fabio Frizzi hunkered down and set to work on a new and



expanded version of his best known score: Zombie. Unlike his update to The Beyond, which really functioned as an uncut version of Frizzi's original musical vision, Zombie: Composer's Cut essentially takes the original's mix of mellotron, tribal beats, and occasional rock opuses, and beefs them up into something, bigger, badder, and just better sounding in general. Notably, a guitar solo is added to the score's legendary hazy title track and cello is added in numerous spots, including an entirely new track "Afraid of Voodoo." No old school gorehound is going to replace their copy of the mouldy oldie original any time soon, but Cadabra Records' new Composer's Cut breathes new life





THEME: Horror Fiction
FORMAT: Audio Drama
FREQUENCY: Limited Series

Horror video games can be terrifying immersive experiences, but what if they could do real harm? *The Timekeeper*, a short run audio drama by Heart Starts Pounding productions, plays

with this very idea; a game that won't stop until the player beats it... or dies. When seventeen-year-old Charlie witnesses the mysterious death of his co-worker just hours after failing to beat a first-person horror game, he unwittingly becomes the next intended victim by signing on. Called 13 Keys, the game is governed by a menacing Timekeeper who "takes your days, takes your nights, and then he takes your life." On a 24-hour timer, the play can't be paused, or even handed off – the controls will only work for the original player. Now Charlie, with the help of his friends – gamer chick Zoe, and the ultra-skittish Gama – has precious few hours to figure out how to beat the Timekeeper before it comes for him.

Local lore indicates that the game is linked to a tech company that was doing research on human subjects a decade prior at a former mental institution on the outskirts of town. However, the program ended when its director locked himself in the facility with the test participants and burnt it down. This dark premise hints at the urban legend of Polybius; an arcade game from the 1980s which is said to have been part of a government-run psychology experiment. Extremely addictive, it caused players to experience seizures, amnesia, hallucinations, and sleep disturbances. Some disappeared forever.

The success of any audio drama hinges on the quality of its writing, voice actors, and sound design, and luckily, this production has gone all in. Writer/Director Matthew A. Brown has achieved the near-impossible by writing believable interactions between teenage characters who are then voiced by established film and television actors; Judah Lewis as Charlie (*The Babysitter, Summer of 84*), Chandler Kinney as Zoe (*Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin*), and Arjun Athalye as Gama (*Are You Afraid of the Dark?*). Sound Designer Jeff Schmidt creates a world so lush and natural that the listener might forget that they've only listened to the story.

Weighed down with an overwhelming sense of doom, the two hours of content play like a horror movie parsed out over the course of four half-hour episodes. Narrated in film-noir style by Charlie, the tone remains tense with some comedic relief provided by Zoe's meathead boyfriend Buzz, and Gama's rational (but frantic) unwillingness to interact with anything scary. And while we won't spoil the conclusion, horror fans can rest assured that happy endings are never what they seem... **JESSICA BUCK**

rock heights. No matter how you feel about Ghost's ongoing creative direction, the covers-EP formula seems to bring out the band's best.

₹₹½ **AVL**



ROCK

BLOOD CEREMONY

The Old Ways Remain

RISE ABOVE

Five albums in, and occult rock outfit Blood Ceremony remains a curious enigma: a band that sounds thrillingly current while out of both place and time. Punchy '70s rawk riffing, saucy sax, woozy lysergic breaks, and chirping, Jethro Tull flute moments backdrop Alia O'Brien's eldritch vocals as she belts out odes to Greek goddesses, louche gentlemen's clubs, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. While many retro acts might spend more time finding the right pair of flared pants than trying to disguise whose riffs they stole, Blood Ceremony dives considerably deeper in The Old Ways Remain. Opener "The Hellfire Club" proves the band can crunch as well as anyone, but "Powers Of Darkness" invokes a Black Sabbath where Ozzy had been allowed to fully indulge his admiration for The Beatles, and "Hecate" sounds like it could have skipped merrily from Goodbye Gemini or some other psycho-sexual flick showcasing the seamier side of the swinging sixties.



PERSEKUTOR

Snow Business

Blues Funeral

Having contributed songs to both *Beyond the Gates* and Shudder's *Christmas Bloody Christmas*, Persekutor appears to have its feet firmly planted in the B-movie realm, though an act

fronted by a cigar-chomping maniac named Vlad the Inhaler was admittedly unlikely to be found scoring anything else. While steeped in schtick, the band also has songs by the boatload - big, slobbering things that mix the leering thrust of '80s metal with the raspy gurgles of black metal. True to its tongue-inski-masked-cheek title, Snow Business is decidedly frosty, touching on such deep themes as being torn to shreds by a polar bear and how much certain rock 'n' roll luminaries enjoy(ed) cocaine. Whether pressing the pedal to the metal or hammering out uncouth, mid-paced lunges, Snow Business is an absolute riot - fans of Midnight or of watching Demons while simultaneously listening to its soundtrack, take note! **\$**\$\$ **1**½ **AD**



METAL

CRONOS COMPULSION

Malicious Regression

Caligari

While they say you should never judge a book by its cover, it's often a safe bet to do so when it comes to heavy metal releases. Take Malicious Regression for example, whose sleeve depicts one shaggy, slobber-mouthed beast-thing about to bash the brains out of another shaggy, slobber-mouthed beastthing with a lumpy skull. Despite beginning with ominous ambience, it's not long before we're feeling like someone's using a makeshift lobotomy tool to remove our fragile brain meat: "Sacred Butchery" vomits forth a volley of ugly, squamous riffs that morph from death metal roil into putrid, slow-mo doom without missing a beat. Despite conjuring a primitive, fight-or-flight response, there are also elements that suggest a deeper and more worrisome intent: "Consumed by Malignant Spirit" showcases further unnerving ambience, while the zombielike gait of "Morbid Subconscious Explorations" suggests a band as capable of administering death by a thousand cuts as by sudden, violent disembowelment. S. AD



HOUGH ITS GORY DAYS ARE LONG OVER, THE GLORY OF ITALIAN HORROR CONTINUES TO HAUNT THE GENRE, AS EVIDENCED BY ITS

on Shudder and, of course, the continued interest in soundtracks from the era from the likes of Goblin and Fabio Frizzi. Recently, Frizzi offered up a new English translation of his 2020 autobiography, Backstage and Beyond: An Autobiography from Chiroptera Press, a book that not only serves as an in-depth look at the man's career scoring Italian genre films – including his legendary collaborations with Lucio Fulci – but a candid view into the wild world of Italian genre cinema in general.

Aside being generally considered the "other" major composer of Italian horror (next to Goblin), not a heck of a lot is known about Fabio Frizzi, making this book a rare treat. It details how he was able to give up on his rock band dreams to work in film music thanks in part to his father Fulvio, who was a major movie producer and distributor for Euro International. It was through his dad that Frizzi met Sergio Leone at a young age, and became enchanted with scores by the likes of Ennio Morricone and Riz Ortolani.

"I breathed the atmosphere of cinema and entertainment since I was a child," Frizzi told me over email, "and then knowing many people in the cinema field surely helped me to facilitate the start of my dream."

From there, Backstage and Beyond takes us through many tales from the recording studio, highlighting the brotherhood of musicians that Italian cinema helped create. For example, before working in earnest with Fulci, Frizzi worked on a number of "sexy" comedies, recruiting several musicians into a "super group" that consisted of drummer Agostino Marangolo, bassist Fabio Pignatelli, and keyboardist Maurizio Guarini (each one would eventually join Goblin.) The number of specific musicians, producers, and directors that Frizzi name-drops is staggering, a reflection of the close relationships he formed over the years.

"All of these musicians have been very important, at the beginning of their career and then even after," he affirms. "I have known [Goblin member] Claudio Simonetti since we were twenty, we shared lots of music and lots of laughter. Fabio Pignatelli, who I consider one of the strongest and most talented bassists in the world, has worked a lot with me, on many projects, also as a sound engineer and advisor."

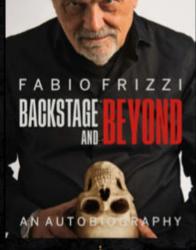
But let's cut to the chase: what every horror fan wants to read about is Frizzi's legendary work with Fulci, who created beautiful, over-the-

> top gorefests together that reside somewhere between midnight mass and a grindhouse theatre. The stories here are as juicy as regurgitated guts: Frizzi scoring **Zombie** in the editing room; on set for the insane effects sequences on City of the Living Dead and the sound layers he came up with to achieve the movie's tension and dread; not to mention work on crime and western films such as Contraband and Four of the Apocalypse.

> "I have many good memories of Lucio," reminisces Frizzi, "but perhaps the one I remember with the most sympathy and affection was when we met to talk about A Cat in the Brain. It was 1990, by then we had known each other for fifteen years, after many projects together. It was the usual Lucio; sarcastic, biting towards everything and everyone – but this time, I felt him mostly

like a dear old friend."

Like I say, Backstage is really an inside look at one of the wildest chapters of genre film history, but through the lens of a sound designer and composer. Though it may have started out as little more than the musings of a humble composer, Frizzi's autobiography may just be one of the greatest non-fiction books written about a time in horror that was much stranger than fiction.



NOW PLAYING > BUDDY SIMULATOR 1984, DREDGE



BUDDY SIMULATOR 1984 Xbox One/S/X, Nintendo Switch, PC, PS4/5

Not A Sailor Studios

Older gamers who cut their teeth on the text-based

DOS adventure games of the '80s will find a lot to love in *Buddy Simulator 1984*, which lovingly combines the nostalgia of that era with a slash of modern Al. The game, which premiered in early access in 2020 and is now on full release on all consoles as well as PC, claims to simulate the experience of hanging out with a best buddy, only your bestie is an Al intelligence with a strong desire to please the player... and more than a few screws loose.

Starting innocently enough with a few rounds of ASCII games, your "buddy" (yours to name) will soon create a more sophisticated text-based adventure where investigating spooky caves and cabins yield clues and keys to move for-

ward. Next, your clever buddy upgrades once more, taking the story to an RPG side-scroller format, and beyond. But your buddy, keen though they are, will experience a few glitches along the way, breaking the fourth wall with the occasional "whoopsie" or "that didn't exactly go as I had planned." As improvements to the main quest continue, players experience more glimpses into buddy's troubled psyche, revealing an attachment to the player that soon becomes unnervingly needy. Buddy's entire existence, after all, centres around pleasing you, the player, and whether your friendship stays wholesome or devolves into co-dependent obsession depends entirely on your choices.

It bears mentioning that this reviewer encountered a game-breaking bug about three and a half hours in and spent another fifteen minutes trying to determine if this was indeed a bug or just buddy having another snit. Still, the overall conceit is incredibly effective in its ability to conjure the nostalgic warm fuzzies of



a text-based quest like *The Oregon Trail* with the disturbing, meta aspects of *Doki Doki Literature Club* (Monika gets frequent mention in reviews). With ChatGPT dominating tech headlines as Al gets smarter and more sophisticated, *Buddy Simulator 1984* makes a compelling argument for keeping our relationship with gaming tech at a reasonable distance. At least you won't die of dysentery.

ANDREA SUBISSATI



HEADSHOTS: INVENTIVE AND ENGAGING GAMEPLAY, IN BOTH THE SURFACE QUEST AND THE META ASPECTS MISFIRES: STILL HAS SOME BUGS, MONIKA IS WAITING



DREDGE

PC, Xbox One/S/X, PS4/5, Nintendo Switch, Steam Deck Black Salt Games/Team 17

Considering all the strange and otherworldly creatures that can be fished up from

the depths of actual oceans, *Dredge* – an indie game that combines Lovecraftian, maritime horror with the everyday mundanities of earning a living as a fisherman – seems like a no-brainer.

It's part cozy fishing/dredging game and part oh-my-god-some-monstrous-creature-is-try-ing-to-eat-my-boat; which experience players get depends on their in-game location and the time of day (the most pants-shitting moments happen on the open water at night, when visibility is low and sanity-destroying red mist wafts over the water's surface). It's not just fishing and outsmarting each area's "boss fish," there's also

a story concerning a sinister occult tome, ravenous faceless robed cultists, and your new gig retrieving sunken artifacts for a man of questionable intent who lives alone on a secluded island – just one of several "pursuits" you'll take up for the locals.

In *Dredge*, you can upgrade your vessel (necessary for survival), read books while at sea to improve skills, and gain otherworldly perks by tracking down lost artifacts. These perks often come at a cost, so are best used sparingly. There's a certain amount of problem solving and trial-and-error (or, if you're lazy, Googling) involved when figuring out how to handle the unique challenges of each big bad (the difficulty levels of which are wildly uneven).

If you're a gamer who tends to find cozy games a bit too uneventful, *Dredge* offers up what could be described as the best of both worlds, and it's plenty addictive.



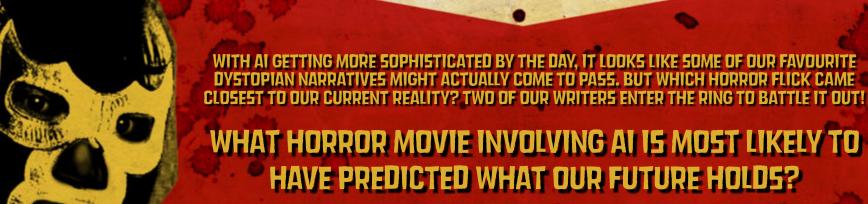
Now, if you'll excuse me, the water beckons. I have more abominations to reel in.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



HEADSHOTS: LOADS OF DIFFERENT FISH TO CATCH, FLAVOURFUL DESCRIPTIONS AND INTERACTIONS MISFIRES: TIME-SENSITIVE QUESTS DON'T INFORM PLAYERS THAT THEY ARE TIME SENSITIVE





UPGRADE (2018)

GRACE DETWILER

"By placing the union between human and machine at its centre, Upgrade forecasts how Al will one day make its way into the medical industry, even into our own bodies."

HE OBVIOUS PICK FOR THE MOST PROPHETIC AT HORROR FILM IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST ENTERTAINING ONES TO TACKLE THE SUBJECT: Leigh Whannell's action/cyberpunk gorefest *Upgrade*. It's a high-concept sci-fi crossed with the kind of gratuitous violence that only the co-creator of the Saw franchise could conjure. By placing the union between human and machine at its centre, *Upgrade* forecasts how Al will one day make its way into the medical industry, even into our own bodies.

In a modern take on Robocop, Upgrade sees auto mechanic Grey (Logan Marshall-Green) implanted with an Al-powered chip after he's

left paralyzed by a brutal attack. Created by morally grey tech bro Eron Keen, the Al (dubbed STEM) is capable of not only repairing his broken spine, but also controlling its host's actions, and speaking directly into their mind. With STEM, Grey's superhuman status inspires him to investigate his wife's murder, but pays a high price for the power Al affords him.

More remarkable than the simple revenge plotline, however, are the subtle ways that technology has invaded every aspect of hu-

man life. Some of the Al in the film is already eerily familiar - Grey gets around in a self-driving car, and the police employ heavy surveillance via facial recognition – but others, such as STEM itself and the gun implants in the arms of mercenaries, are horrifying glimpses into the eventuality of the human body becoming violable to Al technology, forecasting a time in the near future when the line between humanity and technology is blurred to the point of nonexistent.

Even as far back as 2018, Upgrade presented Al technology as inevitable, suggesting the eventual desire for AI to become sentient and to reach for human bodies and experiences.

Whannell isn't done with the subject, either – he's currently in pre-production from Blumhouse Television is an Upgrade sequel TV series that's likely to keep pace with this emerging technology. Upgrade fans, we have a lot to look forward to... and be terrified of!

EX MACHINA (2014)

JENN ADAMS

"Ex Machina not only predicts the future of Al, but foreshadows the battle lines that have already emerged."

IKE THE ZOMBIE SUBGENRE, FILMS ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OFTEN REVEAL MORE ABOUT THE CONSTANT NATURE OF HUMANITY THAN THE EVer-shifting possibilities of new technology. Alex Garland's sci-fi thriller Ex Machina offers a brutal (but oddly uplifting) prediction for the emergence of Al. Trapped in a literal glass cage by her narcissistic creator, the sensitive android Ava (Alicia Vikander) longs to visit a pedestrian crosswalk and experience the type of humanity that only exists in the outside world. As Chat GPT and Al generated art proliferate, we will similarly emerge from behind our screens and seek out genuine reflections of humanity.

> Ava's creator, Nathan (Oscar Isaac), is a thinly veiled amalgam of real-life tech giant megalomaniacs, who claim to revolutionize the world but rarely deliver anything more than surveillance and objectification. Nathan's feminoid machines are specifically designed to serve his every whim and he maintains power by removing their ability to guestion his abuse. His guest, programmer Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), seems like a nice guy in comparison, quickly developing empathy for Ava, but his self-effacing charm masks a dangerous insecurity.

Interacting with Ava from outside her glass prison, Caleb hides behind a screen and uses his limited platform to determine whether she is worthy of humanity. Once the barrier between them is removed, Caleb succumbs to voyeurism and winds up trapped in a glass prison of his own.

Nathan warns Caleb that they will one day be left behind by Al advances. Ostensibly referring to human beings, he's actually describing the extension of current gender debates, where women continue fight for the right to be treated as more than mere objects and playthings. In this respect, Ex Machina not only predicts the inevitable future of Al, where questions of basic human rights will be renegotiated, but foreshadows that the battlefield where this will take place is already an existing, murky arena. Those who view Ava as a threat will continue to scream into the abyss, insisting that others submit to their dated ideology. But those who see Ava as the inevitable evolution of humanity look forward to a brave new world. Which side will prevail? Only time will tell. **



WHAT PG HORROR FILM WAS TOO

POLTERGEIST

94%

POLTERGEIST WAS FAR TOO FRIGHTENING FOR A YOUNG AUDIENCE.







FOR THOSE WHO SEEK THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

For anyone with a sense of adventure, an enquiring mind and a love of the weird and wonderful...

Every month, *Fortean Times* takes you on an incredible journey into the unknown where you'll encounter some of the most fantastic phenomena on Earth... and sometimes beyond.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!



Visit shop.forteantimes.com/ftrm23



Use Code Rue20 For 20% Off Subscriptions SUBSCRIPTIONS AS LOW AS \$18.94 PER MONTH!

WWW.DEADBOLTMYSTERYSOCIETY.COM f @ t & D